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"Mr. Lynde quietly pushed her one side." — Page 14.

THE MAIDENHOOD SERIES.

OUR HELEN.

BY

SOPHIE MAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE DOCTOR'S DAUGHTER," "LITTLE PRUDY STORIES," "DOTTY DIMPLE STORIES," "LITTLE FLYAWAY SERIES," ETC.

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OUR HELEN.

CHAPTER I.

HELEN'S NEWS.

"Whosoever quarrels with his fate does not understand it."

"GOOD evening, Miss Helen. Glad to see you here to-night; but why always in the corner?"

"O, I'm only a boarding-school girl; and Mrs. Satterlee lets me come to her parties just to look on, you know."

"Does she, indeed? That's kind of Mrs. Satterlee. But she'll allow you to talk to me — won't she? I want to ask some more questions about Quinnebasset. Do you know I have a great fancy for that village?"

"Was it really your birthplace, Mr. Lynde?"

"Yes; but I haven't seen it for twenty-six years. They tore me away weeping when I was scarcely eleven months old. But I'm very curious about the people there, especially the Asbury family of Jubilee Hill."

"Why, Mr. Lynde, I didn't tell you our place is called Jubilee Hill."

"No; but, living in Boston, one comes to know a great many things; and I hear your family is like a

nest of five singing-birds in the top of a tree! — how is it?"

"Well, sir, there are five of us girls, and we all sing; but only one of us has a voice like a bird, and that is Charlotte. We call her Sharly."

"And you have the care of the household, Miss Helen?"

"Yes, sir; a little."

"It must be hard for a young girl like you."

"Not so very; for we all run a little wild, particularly when father is gone. So aunt Marian says."

"Is your father gone a great deal?"

"Yes, sir, — attending law courts."

"And how can you be spared from home then?"

An anxious wrinkle cut across Helen's forehead.

"O, Sharly is mother when I am away, and we take turns going to school; but really Sharly ought to be the one always to go, for she is so sensitive and delicate. When mamma was living, she was very tender of Sharly, and said she mustn't have a hard time."

"And how about yourself, Miss Helen? Do you like to work?"

"No indeed; but I am older than Sharly, and not at all delicate; so it doesn't hurt me to work."

Mr. Lynde had heard through Mrs. Satterlee of Helen's motherly devotion to Sharly, and he said now, merely to test her loyalty, —

"Ah, yes; I see how it is. Your sister is young, and girls of that age *are* very trying."

"Sir?"

He had stopped the conversation most effectually. Helen shrank farther into the corner, thinking, indig-

nantly, "Why have I talked so freely with this sarcastic young man? I verily believe he has been trying to draw me out."

"Sir," said she aloud, "I'm going over to the table, if you please, to see those engravings."

As she walked off, supremely dignified, Mr. Lynde gazed after her with a pitying smile. "She is certainly a high-bred looking girl, and not especially meek, I should say. Poor child, if this story we hear is true, she will take it very hard."

Then he fell into little breezy conversations here and there, wherever he happened to drift, and quite forgot Helen till, an hour or so afterwards, chancing to cast his eyes towards the farther end of the long parlor, he saw her standing in an alcove, fixed and white. No one was near her; no one seemed to be looking that way. Thinking she was certainly about to faint, Mr. Lynde quickly crossed the room, and offered her his arm.

"There is a beautiful flower in the conservatory, Miss Helen. I would like to show it to you."

Helen mechanically raised her eyes, and gazed at him "as if he were a steeple in the distance," but finally allowed herself to be led out of the room. Instead of swooning, however, she had no sooner reached the conservatory, than she turned upon her escort, saying through her set teeth, —

"You knew it, Mr. Lynde, — you knew it when you were talking to me just now."

"Knew what, my child?"

He felt himself a hypocrite for the question, but she would not deign to answer it.

"It isn't true — it can't be true. People talk about

other people's affairs, and tell what they don't know, and only guess at."

"Gossip isn't worth minding," said Mr. Lynde, evasively. "Just look at this singular plant."

Helen waved him back with her hand.

"She went down there to marry my father. I heard Mrs. Satterlee talking to Dr. Bowen about it just now. She went to Quinnebasset. What right had she at Quinnebasset? Who sent her off so far?"

"The story may not be true," said Mr. Lynde, kindly. "I'm sure I hope not."

"Yes, sir; Mrs. Satterlee said Mr. Lynde hoped it wasn't true, and that was the way I found out you had heard it. You had heard it, but you never told me. Who is she? Who is Miss Carver? What right had she at Quinnebasset?"

"Calm yourself, Miss Helen, and I will tell you something about her. She is one of the finest —"

"O, I don't want to hear that. Describe her — that's all."

"Well, then; a large woman, plain, genial, lovable —"

"There, stop! do stop! And she went away off two hundred miles to marry a man with five children!"

"Miss Helen, has your father ever written you about this?"

"Not one word," said Helen, with glowing eyes; "and that's why I know it isn't true. I told you so before. Do you suppose my father would take a new wife, and not write me about it, — me, the oldest daughter!"

"He ought not to do so, I am sure," said Mr. Lynde, thoughtfully.

"O, he couldn't, and he wouldn't: he is just the tenderest man. And the idea of his marrying again! Why, he loved mother dearly."

"Helen," said Mrs. Satterlee, entering the conservatory with a faltering step, "I — I — here is a note for you, which came enclosed in a letter to me. Put it in your pocket, dear. Better not read it till you go back to your boarding-house."

Helen answered by deliberately opening the note.

"You weren't afraid I'd faint away, Mrs. Satterlee? I never fainted in my life. And the truth is, I've heard all this before."

"Heard it before? Well, I must say, dear, I feel relieved. But who could have told you, pray?"

"Please, Mrs. Satterlee, will you wait till to-morrow before you ask me any questions?"

Mrs. Satterlee looked at the white, calm face with surprise, then took it between her two hands, and kissed it.

"Why, yes, you queer child. I'll wait till next year, if you wish it;" and the simple-minded lady tripped away to tell Dr. Bowen Helen was one of the reasonable kind, and was taking it as sweetly as an angel.

Mr. Lynde knew better. There was something in the girl's measured tone, and the subdued fire of her eyes, which warned him not to leave her just yet. And indeed, the moment Mrs. Satterlee was out of hearing, Helen's excitement returned. Like many young persons, she was a strange compound of frankness and reserve. With Mrs. Satterlee, a Quinnebasset friend, whom she really loved, she was always shy and reticent, but in the presence of this stranger, for whom she

did not care a pin, she could pour out her real feelings in a burning torrent.

"What shall I do?" cried she, crushing the letter in her hand, and darting through the doorway. "What will become of me? for I suppose I can't die!"

Mr. Lynde sprang after her. "Child, where are you going? What are you trying to do?" for she was running into the street.

"I know what I am doing! Let me alone!"

Mr. Lynde quietly pushed her to one side, and put his hand on the door-knob. The action recalled Helen to her senses.

"You didn't think I was trying to run away — did you? Why, I only wanted to breathe. I never shall breathe again, never, deep down! O, those children, the children mother gave to me!"

Mr. Lynde opened the door, and let the cool evening air into the hall.

"I wouldn't have believed it of my father, my dear, dear father! To think he shouldn't tell me till the last minute, and then put the note in Mrs. Satterlee's letter. Isn't it cruel, cruel?"

Mr. Lynde thought it certainly was, but refrained from saying so. "Her sense of justice is outraged, and I can't blame her in the least," thought he.

"And perhaps he wouldn't have told me of it now, only he wants me to go right home. It is dreadful, dreadful; it just breaks my heart. O, my mother, my mother! I thought he loved my mother!"

"So it is all settled — is it?" said Mr. Lynde, his sympathies strongly moved for the poor child.

"Settled?" wailed Helen. "O, yes; wedding next Thursday."

"Ah, well; we must always accept the inevitable."

"No, we mustn't, either. If she is ever so inevitable, I won't accept her. Who made her inevitable?" cried Helen, with eyes as bright as fire. "She did it herself. She made father believe he needed a wife: you can make father believe anything. All she had to say was, 'Poor man, how I pity you, with no head to your family but just Helen!'"

Mr. Lynde's mouth, which he had been keeping on drill duty, suddenly danced out of line.

"O, yes, you may laugh, Mr. Lynde, for you don't know father. See what he writes. Why, she makes him believe she loves children, the artful creature! He says so. There are five of us, and I wish there were sixteen, — yes, and all wicked like me."

Mr. Lynde stepped before Helen again, and put his hand on the door-knob.

"O, I'm not crazy. I only said Miss Carver took a fancy to Sharly and the children when she went to Quinnebasset; and I suppose that's why she wants to come to our house."

"She has never seen *you*, Miss Helen."

Helen looked up eagerly.

"No, — O, no. I didn't think of that. She wouldn't dare come if she had seen me; was that what you meant? You know her: can't you tell her about me? Tell her I'm dreadful, and never was conquered. I take it from my great-grandmother. You tell her she'll have trouble with me, and she'd better look out."

"Helen," said Mr. Lynde, in a tone that demanded attention, "you shock me. How can a girl appear so sweet as you do, and be so bitter underneath. I will

tell you now what I said to Mrs. Satterlee when I heard this report. 'If the children are all like Helen,' said I, 'I don't so much wonder at Miss Carver.'"

"Did you say that?" said Helen, blushing. "Then I'm deceitful. But when anybody comes that hasn't any right, and takes those children away from me, — my own little Bel, and all —"

"My poor child, if you knew this woman you dread so much —"

"I shall know her soon enough! But do you think I'll call her mother? No, never! O, please don't go away, Mr. Lynde; stay here a minute. I can control myself well enough, but I don't want to."

"Don't want to control yourself?"

"No. I'll have to do it by and by, and do it forever. I'll have to go into my brains, and lock myself in, and stay there, on account of the children, — don't you know? don't you see? But now I want to talk, — I must, I will, — and there's nobody I can speak to but you. If I said a word to Mrs. Satterlee, she would run and tell."

"And how do you know but I, too, shall run and tell? You never saw me more than half a dozen times in your life."

"No, sir; but a man would be ashamed to report what a little girl says. And, besides, you are not a friend of our family, like Mrs. Satterlee. You haven't the least interest in this."

"Perhaps I have more interest in it than you imagine, Helen. The lady you are ready to tear in pieces is my aunt."

"What! Miss Carver? Why, Mr. Lynde!"

"My dearly beloved aunt Katherine, and the best friend I have in the world."

"O, I'm so sorry, sir! but, then, I can't help it."

"And, Helen, if she has really consented to enter your family, believe me, you are a very fortunate girl, — more fortunate than she is, I fear."

"O, now you are going to hate me, Mr. Lynde, and I don't blame you. And of course you'll tell her what I said, — it's right that you should."

"Indeed, my child, I shall do no such thing. Why should I prejudice my aunt against the very person she will need to lean upon when she comes into the family?"

There was consummate tact in these words; they thrilled Helen for the moment, and gave her a glimpse of the noble womanhood which was latent within her.

"Well," said she, tremulously. "But I tell you it's dreadful to have anybody's father so imposed upon. He actually says she reminds him of mother! Now, Mr. Lynde, the truth is, mother was an angel."

"Helen, wouldn't you like to go home, — that is, to your boarding-house?"

"I don't care where I go. No matter what becomes of me now."

"Because, if you wish, I will make your adieux to Mrs. Satterlee, and take you away quietly."

"Thank you. You see, mother gave those children to me."

"I can't leave the girl in this state of mind," thought Mr. Lynde, as they walked silently along the street; "but what shall I say to her?"

"Helen, I suppose the children love you?"

"Dearly, dearly."

"And you have some influence over them?"

"They don't need any influence; they are just the best little things, if you only let them make butterscotch, and do what they want to."

"But they think very much as you think?"

"Poor little dears! — why shouldn't they?"

"Well, it has just occurred to me what a Bedlam you can make, if you choose."

Helen stopped short for a full half minute, her face working with a variety of expressions.

"Couldn't I?" said she at last, clicking her boot-heels firmly against the pavement; "but do you suppose I'd do such a thing, Mr. Lynde?"

"I can't say. It depends upon what sort of girl you are; and you are almost a stranger to me."

"Yes; but you think I'm a perfect fury, and that isn't true. I've no idea of stirring up Sharly and the children. Poor, poor Sharly! If she doesn't know she is imposed upon, I shan't tell her. I'll just be quiet, and do my duty."

"Cheerfully, like a 'child of God,'" added Mr. Lynde, gently, as if he were finishing Helen's sentence for her.

Helen started, and gazed up at him out of the corners of her eyes. How white his face looked in the moonlight! She recollected now that she had heard that he was a sick man, — sick, and very serious-minded, no doubt, though one would hardly take him for that sort of person.

"Here we are at the house," said she. "Thank you; you are very kind."

"Good by, Helen. Who knows but I may call to see you some time at Quinnebasset? And, on the other

hand," added he, in a tone of sadness, "we may never meet again. But in either case, my friend, you need not fear that what you have said to me to-night will do any harm; and I hope you won't think I didn't care, and didn't pity you, for I do care, and perhaps I understand your feelings better than you suppose. Only, my child, do try to be patient, and true to yourself."

"O, yes; true to myself, such as I am," responded Helen, trying to smile.

"Always strike your hour."

"I don't think I know what you mean, sir."

"Why, do as a clock does when its long hand reaches twelve. It strikes its hour, its appointed hour, and then goes on to the next without looking forward or back."

"O, dear, yes."

"Well, you have a pretty big hour to strike this time, Helen; I can't deny it; but your good sense tells you it won't do to stand and hesitate, and clear your throat, and beg to be let off ten or fifteen minutes, for that would set the clock all wrong. You have to do your present duty, and let the future take care of itself. I mean, let God take care of it. And now — "

Mr. Lynde checked himself, for Helen was gazing fiercely at the stars as if she did not hear. He would say no more. Never mind; perhaps his preachment had not been lost, after all; and he smiled as he thought of that famous cold city of the Greeks, where words congealed as soon as spoken, and so were preserved till the next summer, when they thawed, and became

audible. There are many frozen words in the world, but the time always comes for them to thaw.

"And now, good by again. Will you shake hands, Miss Helen?"

Helen gave him her hand without looking at him.

"It will come to me one of these days how wicked I am; but I don't feel it yet. When it says, 'Honor thy father and thy mother,' it doesn't mean step-mother, now, does it?"

"Good by, Miss Helen!"

"O, yes, I forgot. Good by, Mr. Lynde."

CHAPTER II.

JUBILEE HILL.

SQUIRE ASBURY'S house held its head high, overlooking all the little village of Quinnebasset. It was of freestone, and thoroughly well built, from the French roof, with dormer windows, to the broad piazza steps, which let themselves down upon the April mud with a leisurely, well-to-do air, as if they had settled there merely to have a good time, and enjoy the prospect from Jubilee Hill.

On the south and east, you could see the river and the bridge, and Helen was gazing out of the "garden chamber" window upon a sort of Indian-ink landscape, bare trees, and whity-brown hills against a dingy sky. Nothing had come to life yet in the garden but the Italian bees, and they were bumping their heads together half awake, or creeping about in the patches of snow, dreaming they were in Italy, but finding out their mistake when chilled to the heart, and unable to fly back to the hive.

Helen had swept and garnished the parlors for the expected bride, and here, at three o'clock in the afternoon, she sat in her morning wrapper, "weary and heart-tired," thridding her fingers through her hair.

"Well, at any rate, Madam That-is-to-be, you won't dare come up here, for this is my castle."

It was the prettiest chamber in the house. On a corner bracket stood a statue of Love reviving Life — a winged youth bending tenderly to warm with his breath a limp white butterfly; on another bracket, a Clytie, and against the wall several engravings and fine pictures in oil, together with bits of framed seaweed and autumn leaves; in the best light, at the foot of the bed, Mrs. Asbury's portrait — a noble face, full of intellect and strength; while over that and the largest pictures drooped caressingly the glossy leaves of an English ivy, which extended quite across the room. It was a sacred ivy, for Mrs. Asbury had brought it with her when she came to the house a bride. For eighteen years it had adorned the parlor walls, but to-day Helen had unclasped its tendrils from their old supports, and brought it up stairs "where it belongs," said she to the wondering children. "Father lets me have mother's portrait, and the ivy and the portrait go together."

"But the parlor looks so bare!" murmured Sharly.

"Hang up a hornet's nest, then," said Helen, grimly.

Alas! her lightest word was law. If there was such a thing as a hornet's nest on the premises, the twins would find it, or perish in the attempt. Helen would have been appalled if she had known that at this moment Vic and Van were dragging a sort of swamp back of the mill, and filling their aprons with rubbish. As she sat "dreading her hair" and surveying the landscape, she saw Ozem Page walking rapidly across the garden. "Bad news of some sort," she thought, for he was a man that always brought it.

"Anything happened, Mr. Page?" said she, putting her head out of the window.

"No, ma'am; I only came to fetch some shorts for the cow, and I thought you'd be pleased to know that by the blessing of Providence and Atwood's bitters, Dorkis is a good deal better, and thinks she can get up here to-night for a call."

"O, does she?" replied Helen, faintly; "that's as bad news as I want to hear," added she to herself. "Dorcas Page! she will be equal to a funeral sermon for taking down the bride's spirits. But why do I care? If madam marries for money, she deserves tribulation."

"My darling friend," cried Helen, not audibly, but with her little gold pen, which she suddenly seized and dipped in ink, — for whether she combed her hair or not, she must write to her beloved Diantha Cary whenever the mood was on her, —

"DEAR DI, and O DEAR DI: Folks can't die, though, when they want to. Thurzy Bumpus, our girl, has gone off, and left all the dishes in the house dirty. And now Dorcas Page is coming up here to-night to condole with the bride. I expect next thing aunt Marium will drop in, and that will crown the whole. The children are in an awful way, or were when I got home, weeping and wailing, and threatening to drown themselves. Sharly still declares she'll keep her room; but bless you, she won't. They all exclaim, 'O Helen, we won't have any mother but you!' It touched me to the heart to hear them shout for joy when I got out of the stage Saturday night. Bel hid her face in my bosom just as she used to do when she was afraid of rats, and

the twins seemed to have an idea that Helen would make it all right somehow. Precious innocents! As if I could forbid the banns! Father went away Saturday morning; so I haven't seen him yet, and shan't till he is that woman's husband. When I parted from him last Christmas, he was so dear and sweet! and now, O Di, I wish he had failed last fall when your uncle did. He could have failed, for he says some of his money is "invested in bubbles;" and then, of course, *this* wouldn't have happened, for she is a teacher, and marries for money; you know it as well as I.

"I was going to tell you about our kitchen girls, Polly Pidge and Thurzy Bumpus. The moment Polly heard of the expected marriage, she ran away, though we didn't care much, for, as the other girl, Thurzy, says, 'she's a slack piece;' but now, here goes Thurzy herself! She is the one who has lived with us five years, and is always relating her religious experiences, having spells of being 'sick and tired o' sin.' She is a diamond in the rough, and I never dreamed of her doing this. Iv'e told you about her, you must remember. Her real name is Theresa, but her mother has mispronounced it from the cradle.

"'O, Thurzy,' said I, this morning, when she announced her intention of leaving, 'is this doing as you would be done by? What has become of your religion?'

"'Well, the fact is,' said she, 'I ain't overstocked with grace, and never pretended to be. I'm an independent woman, and belong to as respectable a family as there is in the Wix neighborhood, and I don't feel that I am called to bear persecution in this shape.

If it was for righteousness' sake, I wouldn't say a word.'

"'What persecution do you mean, Theresa Bumpus?'

"'A city lady,' said she, and began to pack her trunk.

"I know very well Delia Liscom is the cause of this — her sister in the church, and a great busybody.

"'Well, girls,' said Theresa, after dinner, 'I've put up with a good deal from you, first and last, because you're nothing but children; but I ain't called to slave for newfangled folks when they're too good to let me eat at the same table with 'em; that's my doctrine.' Then she throws the dinner bones into the stove to burn for the hens, which scents the house dreadfully; and off she goes, with her nose in the air, and up I come to my garden chamber. Erastus, our hired man, will leave next, I suppose; and why not we children? This is a pretty time of year to be married in! 'Happy the bride the sun shines on;' but it doesn't shine on her to-day, and I hope she isn't happy, for she has no right to be — Just here Sharly puts in her head, beautifully frizzed. 'Would you wear your best silk?' 'No,' I say, 'blue poplin;' and she retires, dear, sweet, forgiving girl, to deck herself like a lamb for the sacrifice. I shall wear my horrid green merino, and yank my hair into a hard knot, as a faint expression of my feelings on this melancholy occasion. Chin out, head back. 'How d'ye, Mrs. William Asbury? Do you like your tea strong?' I'll treat her with all respect, for she's my unfortunate father's wife. I'll do my duty — 'cheerfully, like a child of God!' What makes that sentence keep ringing in my ears? I do

want to be good, — the very highest kind of good, — but you may tell that pale young man it's a little too much to ask me to be cheerful.

"Ah, Di, I could bear it if papa had talked to me, and asked my opinion. He always treated me like the head of the family before; he never bought the children a pair of shoes without consulting me, and he would make me select the new carpets last fall, though aunt Marian was to meet us in Boston the very next day, and there is nothing she likes so well as giving advice. He said, 'Helen, your taste is better than hers; and more than that, the carpets are yours, and you are the one that I want to please.' My carpets, indeed! But what wounds me sorest is his forgetting mother. Di, there isn't a day or an hour but I think of that precious woman; yet here is her own husband — he does not remember her any more. It is so dreadful to be forgotten, to be cast away like a wilted flower! O, my angel mother! does it grieve you up there to know it? Her painted eyes follow me as if her soul was in them; they keep saying, 'Helen, I beseech you to take care of those children.' 'Mother dear, I will. She shan't harm a hair of their heads. I'll hold Bel close to my heart, and if tender Sharly cries at a sharp word, I'll take her away, and make a home for her somewhere else. You gave the children to me, and I will always remember it. Father may forget you, but not I. I will never call any other woman mother' — Here comes my pretty Sharly in her blue poplin, the little beauty. I'm afraid the bride will get 'shined on,' after all. But I must go and see to those children. Good by.

"Your once happy HELEN.

"P. S. I told you how I burned my hand, when I was a wee, wee girl, by taking up a flatiron when mother had warned me not to do it. 'Now Helen must suffer,' said mamma, in sorrow. 'No,' said I, stoutly, 'Ellie WON'T suffer;' and I didn't even cry. I shut my teeth together, and say it now, 'Ellie WON'T suffer.'"

While Helen wrote, the whole Asbury mansion seemed to be flying loose down stairs. Theresa Bumpus, in her eagerness to escape the possible indignity of eating at second table, had departed at two o'clock, leaving the dinner dishes unwashed, and the stable door open. The Jersey cow, ambling along to the back door for her usual supply of potato parings and crusts, was surprised to find the pail empty, and little Miss Bel sitting on it, drumming with her leaky boots. The children's quest had led them through bogs, snow-drifts, and mud; but they had succeeded at last in finding a hornet's nest, which, with a half bushel or so of other rubbish, they had dropped on the parlor sofa and chairs for Helen to arrange as it should please her fancy. She did know how to make things look so nice! and they had always wanted her to stick some bir ls' nests on the walls, and hang up one or two hollow turnips, with something green growing in them, as Lydia Ann Crane did; and she could do it, for she had the materials right at hand. But this was not all. Bel had been drawn bodily out of a mud-puddle, and sister Vic had dressed her anew in a ragged frock and faded apron; another "lamb decked for sacrifice." And the soiled clothes, what more natural than that

Vic should hang them to dry in the front windows up stairs — a mass of blue at one window, a mass of red at another, for Vic's balmoral also needed drying. Vandelia, the more lady-like of the twins, was scuffing about the yard in Erastus's rubbers, dragging after her Sharly's plaid shawl, well bespattered with mud. It was evidently a headless home; there was no king in Israel, and each child did that which was right in his own eyes. It seemed to be right just now in the eyes of Victoria, the more enterprising of the twins, to make butter-scotch, instead of dressing to receive the new mother.

"Come, Van, butter the pan," was her poetic summons from the doorway. Time was short, and they might never have any more jollifications after to-day.

"Will her come to stay?" wheezed ragged Isabel through her stuffed pipes. Isabel was subject to croup.

"Yes, she'll stay for everlasting," replied Vic, nasally. Vic had a severe cold in the head.

"Well, her musn't; don't want her to; Helen's my mamma."

"Hush, Bel Raspberry," said Van, patting her with the butter-knife, and looking at Vic.

But Vic was suspending judgment; she did not know yet exactly how to feel about the new mother, but it would all depend upon Helen. Helen had *said*,—

"Children, now don't be rude to this person, and hurt papa's feelings. Let's show her that our mother was a lady, and taught us good manners."

Thus preached Helen; but how did she practise?

"If she throws back her head, I'll throw back mine," resolved the shrewd Vic.

"Children, children! what are you doing here?" called out a clear, young voice, and Helen sailed into the kitchen in her sea-green merino, known as "aunt Marian's folly," the most unbecoming and unpopular dress in her whole wardrobe.

"What! making candy at this time of day?"

Vic whisked off the kettle, answering meekly, "You see, we felt bad, and wanted to do something; and what else could we do?"

"You think molasses cures everything," said Helen, with an amused smile; "but I'm really ashamed of you. Not dressed yet, and this nice lady coming!"

"Well, you'd better look in the glass your own self. What made you go and put on that awful green dress, and not curl your hair?"

Helen laughed, and put up her hand to feel the rich, dark tresses which she had doubled and twisted into a tight bunch at the back of her head.

"So you think I'm homely, girls — very, very homely?"

"No, we don't," cried Vic, flying into her arms, and leaving Van to scrape the kettle; "we think you're the handsomest girl that ever lived, only you're handsomer when you wear decent clothes."

Helen was very well aware of this. She had little permanent beauty, but great latent possibilities, and her style of dress made all the difference in the world with her looks. Vic began to suspect mischief.

"Why don't you try to be pretty, Helen? I mis

trusted all the time you didn't want her to come, and now I know it."

"She's no business coming here, so there!" said Van, dropping the kettle, and joining in the embrace.

"No binny comin'," wheezed Bel, clutching Helen by a green ruffle.

"Dearest, darling sister, we don't want any mother but you," cooed Vic, through her nose, echoed by Van, and reëchoed by Bel.

"There, there; that'll do," said Helen, pressing the little rebels to her aching heart. "You all fell in love with her when she was Miss Carver, and you didn't know what was going to happen; and now, if you really love me, you'll go dress yourselves. I look nice and tidy — don't I? So must you; and we'll all behave as well as we can. They say she's a lady, and no doubt she'll treat us well; but if she doesn't," — here Helen choked a little, — "if she scolds, there's a sister Helen to protect you; so never you fear."

After which very judicious remark, our eldest daughter began to wash the candy kettle, and clear up the kitchen; while the children started on voyages of discovery for their best clothes. Helen, the only one with the least sense of order, had been gone so long that she did not know much better than they where to hunt, and consequently they all got in a flurry, and there was no time for Helen to take a last look at the parlors. She never dreamed of the hay and stubble lying about, and Sharly did not see it, for she was in her chamber doing her hair over again. Vic could not find her sash, which was dangling from the rafters of the shed; Bel's hair ribbons had been whirled away

by a breeze; Van had ripped her blue skirt off the waist, and Helen had drawn her into the back parlor, where somebody said there was a pincushion, when their father's step was heard in the hall.

"Scamper!" cried Helen, opening the china closet door, and pushing Van out of sight.

This done, she dropped the pincushion, and had just got her chin in position as the door opened, and behold, the new mother!

CHAPTER III.

THE ARRIVAL.

MISFORTUNES never come singly. As Mrs. Asbury entered the front door, Mrs Page walked in through the kitchen.

"Ah! cousin William," sighed she, "I haven't been out but once this spring, and that was to Mrs. Liscom's funeral; but I thought I must try to get up here to congratulate the bride."

It was Mrs. Asbury's first welcome home, and it gave her a dreary feeling, as if a hopeless rain-storm had set in. It seemed to have a blighting effect on the fire, for the two live coals which were left of it suddenly turned black in the face and died. Of course Mrs. Page was presented at once, and while she offered a dark-gloved hand to the bride, and dropped a tremulous kiss on her cheek, Helen had time to observe the state of the parlors, and blush for shame. She had not looked at the bride yet. She must begin at her feet, and take her in by slow degrees. The feet were small, and neatly cased in French kids. So far, so good. "Yes, quite well, thank you, Mrs. Page." The voice was low, sweet, delicious. Helen ventured then to raise her eyes as far as the bonnet-strings; but by that time Sharly had brushed by her, and thrown both arms

round the intruder's neck, exclaiming with a girlish gush, —

"O, my dear mamma, I am so glad to see you!"

Helen was chilled, disgusted. Never had Sharly's sweetness been so little to her taste.

"It's a lie. Sharly doesn't know it, but it's a lie."

She returned her father's greeting warmly. She had not seen him for months, and he did look so uncomfortable; beginning to repent already perhaps. Dear papa. She must pity him, for she was sure he had been shamefully imposed upon.

"Katharine, this is our Helen, the eldest, the one you have never seen."

He was a proud man, and there was a good deal of the autocrat in his upper lip; but his mouth trembled now, and his voice sounded husky. He looked pleadingly at Helen, as if not at all sure what she would do. He knew he had not treated her frankly and fairly: would she visit her resentment upon the strange lady he had brought home? She was such a fearless girl, and he had seen her blaze with anger at what she considered an injustice.

It was the decisive moment. Helen looked up, an Mrs. Asbury looked down. She was only a very little taller, but Helen had a feeling that she did look down, or rather that she herself was looking up. It was a grand soul that sat in those mild eyes. Even Helen saw that. A plain face, too irregular to lay the slightest claim to beauty. A straight mouth, but too wide; well-arched brows, but too thin; cheek bones high, and jaws broad; there was nothing perfect but the high,

calm forehead and the noble head, which was concealed as yet under the gray travelling-bonnet.

"He didn't marry her for her beauty," thought Helen; but at that moment Mrs. Asbury smiled, and against her will Helen felt the fascination.

It was a broad smile in more senses than one, for a smaller mouth could hardly have expressed so much, and certainly would not have revealed so many superb teeth.

"How do you do, ma'am?" said Helen, faintly, but there was no frost in the words. She had forgotten to put it in. Yes, and worse than that, she actually raised her lips to the beguiling face. Strange mistake, owing entirely to the bewitchment of that smile; but Mrs. Asbury knew better than to take advantage of it, but playfully turned and kissed Helen on the cheek.

A sharp woman, very, but not cold-natured; for directly after she pressed Helen close in her arms, and whispered, —

"I know all about it, dear. I too have lost a mother."

Tears sprang to Helen's eyes, but she crushed them back with the sudden thought, —

"That was an artful speech! She made it on purpose to win me over, but I'm not so easily duped."

"Come here, my poor forlorn little Hair-Bell," said the fond father, taking up the baby just arrived from the kitchen.

She owed her pet name to her luxuriant hair, which at this moment resembled a pathless wilderness, full of snares and pitfalls.

"What is that swelling on the child's cheek?" ex-

claimed Mrs. Page, as the new mother searched for a kissable spot. "Mumps, I do believe. Does it hurt you to swallow anything sour?"

"'Tisn't sour," replied the little one, relieving her cheek of an instalment of butter-scotch.

Mrs. Page's anxiety was lulled for the time.

"Vic, my dear, where's the other half of you?"

"Coming, papa;" and Van's face was "dimly seen and withdrawn," till she had finished pinning her frock together, when she stole in, looking like a gypsy, or, worse still, like a civilized child relapsed into barbarism.

Greetings exchanged, she glanced at Vic, to know how to behave. Vic, copying Helen to the life, was coolly looking over an album. Van turned and coolly looked over a book. Even little Bel had drawn away from the stranger, after one sticky kiss, and gone to help Helen remove the load of miscellaneous rubbish which littered the room. Sharly, pretty, winsome creature, had attached herself to the new mother, and was offering those little hospitalities which Helen was too agitated to remember. It was Sharly who remembered dear mamma's bonnet and wraps, and brought fresh towels when she bathed her face and hands in the marble basin, back of the front stairs. It was Sharly who said and did all the pleasant things that evening, and Mrs. Asbury never forgot the kindness.

"There, they have cleared a partial vacuum on the sofa," said Mr. Asbury, with an attempt at playfulness. "I think, Katherine, you and Mrs. Page can now sit down and be comfortable."

Mrs. Asbury smiled, and glanced about the room

approvingly. It was all pearl color and crimson. The carpet was of pearl-colored Brussels, with a crimson vine running over it; the walls pearl-colored, with border and panels of crimson; while crimson lambrequins adorned the curtains and the marble mantels, and puffings of the same bright hue ran round the seats of the sofas and chairs. A pleasant room, but the very lamps which Helen lighted seemed to burn blue, as Mrs. Page remarked.

"Ah, yes, as I was saying, I haven't been out before since the funeral. Poor Phebe Liscom! I went to her house just twice after she married; once to make a bridal call, just as I'm doing now, and the second time to attend her funeral. She was Hiram Liscom's fourth wife, and she didn't live a year."

Mrs. Page was in her darkest mood to-night, unfortunately. She was not without occasional gleams of cheerfulness; but a wedding filled her with untold gloom. Death was sad, but marriage far sadder; and from the day when she rashly gave her hand to the slow-witted Ozem Page, she had never heard of even a love affair without a shudder.

"Mrs. Asbury, you must be a person of courage to come into such a family as this."

The poor bridegroom picked up a stray turnip, and planted it on an ottoman.

"Of course you are aware it is a great undertaking, but you don't begin to foresee what you've got to go through with. I hope you are blessed with a strong constitution."

"Thank you, I am always well," was the cheery reply; "and so are you, I hope, Mrs. Page."

Unfortunate remark!

"Ah! Mrs. Asbury, I should think one look at me would show you that I never had a well day in my life."

Mrs. Asbury saw then that the handsome face was thin and sallow, and there was a drawn look about the mouth.

The whole village called Mrs. Page "spleeny;" but as the stranger met her beautiful gray eyes with the lonesome look in them like wind-clouds in November, her great heart throbbed with pity, and she thought, "Here is a poor suffering soul, a monomaniac, perhaps. Let her pour out her miseries. I can bear it."

It was well Mrs. Asbury had fortified herself, for she was now obliged to listen to the harrowing particulars of a dreadful illness — such as no mortal had known before that lived to tell the tale.

"Helen," said Mr. Asbury, leaving the ladies to their cheerful chat, and following his daughter into the dining-room, "isn't the house a little out of order? There are rags in the chamber windows, — red rags, — and we were nearly tripped up by a jumping-rope on the piazza. What does it mean?"

He spoke in a tone of mild surprise, forgetting that chaos was a common thing at Jubilee Hill.

"Father," said Helen, distressed and ashamed, "Thurzy— "

"Say Theresa, my dear."

"Theresa has gone off."

"Not for good?"

"Yes, sir, for good or bad; at any rate, for always."

Mr. Asbury rubbed his hands together nervously, and looked quite appalled.

"Theresa gone? What possessed the girl? Do you know, child, we haven't had any supper?"

"I'm going to get it, papa," said Helen, tying on her kitchen apron, and trying to look capable. "I think I saw a plate of cake."

"Send to your aunt Maria's to borrow some bread, if necessary, and to-morrow we'll try what can be done," said the unhappy man, and went back to the parlor with a gallows air, wondering if Mrs. Asbury was particularly hungry.

To Helen's surprise she found a platter of cold chicken on the pantry shelf, besides a loaf of whitest bread, some glasses of French custard, and a basket of frosted cake. It was like a fairy gift.

"Thurzy isn't so bad, after all, the dear old soul. Now I'll show Mrs. Asbury we can set a respectable table if we do look like Arabs. Not that I care much what she thinks, except for father's sake."

Helen did her best, and when Mr. Asbury led his wife out to supper his brow cleared, for the dining-room was in perfect order, the table elegantly spread; and last, but not least, Mrs. Page could not possibly stay, but had gone home to make herself a bowl of gruel.

"Is she a relative?" asked Mrs. Asbury. "I heard her address you as cousin William."

"Yes, a third cousin; but really, Katharine, she does not call once in three months. I was astonished to see her here to-night."

"O, mamma," said Sharly, "she is ever so good; but

we can't help laughing at her. Everybody laughs. They say when she goes to class-meeting and talks over her troubles, Mr. Liscom gets up and sings,

'Don't talk about suffering here below.
Let's talk about loving Jesus.'"

"That is very impertinent of him," said Mr. Asbury, smiling.

They were about taking their seats at table, and Helen glanced at her father with flushed cheeks and a throbbing heart. Was it nothing to him that she, the eldest daughter, must resign her post at the head of the table, which she had honorably filled for more than two years? Why, he did not even look at her; he was thinking only of handing madam to her chair gracefully.

"Helen, my child, you have forgotten the butter-knife."

There was an undertone of displeasure in his voice which aroused Helen to the consciousness that she was looking very cross. And raising her eyes, she saw, as in a mirror, that the twins were knitting their brows, and that Vic's scowl approached the terrific. It was so absurd that she could hardly help laughing.

"Guess you feels better," said little Bel, raising her mouth, still tawny with butter-scotch, for a kiss.

What would the strange lady think of such a family?

Mrs. Asbury, whose part it was this evening to hear and see as little as possible, had begun to turn the tea, with a serene face, when there came a powerful ground swell, which set the table rocking, and the dishes to dancing. She looked bewildered, as well she might; her first thought being of an earthquake.

"Are there any spirits present?" spoke up Vic. "If so, will they please rap out their names?"

"Hush! Victoria," said her father as sternly as it was possible for so gentle a man to speak. "Helen, child, what ails this table?"

"Why, father, I suppose you knocked out the chip with your foot. One of the castors broke yesterday, and Theresa had to prop it up as well as she could."

Mr. Asbury suppressed a groan. It seemed to him this evening as if the underpinning had suddenly dropped out of everything. Mrs. Page was right; his bride must be a woman of courage to come into such a family. Not only were house and furniture in a damaged condition, but the manners of the children impressed him for the first time as strangely uncultivated. Sharly was the only one who behaved properly, and the new mother's eyes rested on her with gratitude. She was too much furbelowed, and would have looked better with less jewelry. But Sharly was an extremely pretty girl, and never failed to please. Beside her Helen was as plain as a wimpled nun. Mrs. Asbury wondered what her nephew, Morris Lynde, could have seen in her which impressed him so strongly.

"It is far from a commonplace face, and may be capable of lighting up into beauty, but I don't fancy the expression. Then, her odd style of dress! I should think her pretty sister might tell her better than to wear green, and do her hair in that enormous French twist. A singular girl, and very cold-mannered. Is the coldness all for me? How sweetly she smiles on her little sisters, while a look at me turns her to stone. Ah! well, I must study her a while."

CHAPTER IV.

BRIDAL CALLS.

"Such harmony in motion, speech, and air,
That without fairness she was more than fair."

"WELL, there now, how *do* you like her?" cried the children in chorus, as they rushed into Helen's room on their way to bed.

Helen began to unclasp her breastpin before answering.

"Pshaw, now, what's the use in being so cautious?" said Sharly. "Speak right out, and say you think she's homely."

Helen did no such thing; her strong point was her self-control, and she slowly dropped the window curtains, waiting to feel as calm as she looked.

"I counted three gray hairs," pursued Sharly; "and I'll warrant she's as much as thirty years old."

"What if she is?" said Helen, at last; "wasn't our own mother thirty-five when she died?"

"O, but that was very different, Helen; for mamma was married, and you see this woman is a regular old maid."

"I thought of that myself," said Vic. "I just despise ole maids — don't you, Helen? Come, speak, and say something."

The keen eyes of Vic, and the milder orbs of Van, were fixed earnestly on the eldest sister. She felt that it was a critical moment, and the dizzy thought rushed over her brain, "I can set them all against her. I'll do it; I will, I will!" She seemed to be deliberately taking down her hair; but there were life and death in her soul. "Evil, be thou my good;" and she plunged a hairpin into the cushion fiercely; then gently put in another, as she recalled her own words of last week,— "But do you suppose I'd do such a thing, Mr. Lynde?" She forgot she was in the garden chamber, and almost heard the click of her own heels on the Boston pavement. "God help me! I won't turn the house into a Bedlam. I'll do my duty,— I will, I will."

"Can't you as much as tell us whether you think she's homely or not?" said Vic, indignantly.

"Well, I think her hands and feet are beautiful."

"But her face?"

"Pretty homely," said Helen, laughing. "I mean just what I say. There *is* a pretty kind of homely, and it is ever so much more interesting than a doll face, and I'd rather have it."

The children understood her at once.

"I think so too," said Vic. "I kept noticing myself look at her the whole time,— she's so sort of funny."

"I liked her when I first saw her. Don't you remember how she made a rabbit on the wall?" said Van.

"There's a charm about her, I think myself," said Sharly, forgetting her dislike of old maids; "but how stiff you were to-night, Helen!"

"Was I?"

"Why, yes," said the twins; "you acted some as you do to Peeky Liscom when it's none of her business."

"*Miss* Liscom — not Peeky."

"Well, *Miss* then; and it seemed as if you didn't like her — say, do you? That's what we want to know."

Helen's head whirled again, but she almost flayed it with the hair-brush before answering.

"Like her, you little tiresome goosies? Isn't she papa's own wife? Remember we must always — "

Helen scorned breaking down; but her voice shook now, and she rushed into the closet to hide her face. The strain of the last few hours had been tremendous, and she could bear no more.

The duet looked at each other in dismay.

"Now see what you've done," said Sharly. "It nearly kills Helen and me to have this dreadful woman coming in the place of our own dear mamma, but you seem to have forgotten we ever had a mother."

"O, what a story, Sharl Raspberry!" exclaimed Vic. "I went out into the summer house this very afternoon, and cried." And, thinking what had been done could be done again, she twitched her eyelids like the string of a shower-bath, but was chagrined to find the water would not come. As Sharly had the gift of tears, and was crying with perfect ease, Vic felt her failure to be all the more mortifying.

Helen dreamed that night of step-mothers swooping down in the form of black birds of prey, which she beat off continually with an iron spoon and a coffee-pot; for the thought of breakfast haunted her, and she had forgotten to notice how much bread had been left over from supper. To her relief, she found next morning, upon further exploration of the pantry, that there was food enough there to last the family a week. Mrs. As-

bury entered the kitchen in the prettiest of morning wrappers, and offered to help, but Helen assured her with dignity that there was no need. She did wish Sharly would come down, but never once thought of calling her; for, though Sharly could be a deft little handmaiden whenever she chose, she was considered far too delicate to be depended upon. In truth, she did not expect, or wish, to be depended upon; and even little Bel had come to understand the fact, and hardly ever went to her with a request; for, though Sharly was always sweet, she was not half so likely to meet the little baby-wants as Vic and Van, who were often rather cross.

They were very cross this morning, having been waked from a sound sleep, and sent to the barn to hunt for eggs; but they recovered their smiles, and the breakfast passed off quite creditably in spite of a few mistakes. In the midst of the meal, Mr. Page rushed in pale and breathless, exclaiming, —

"Dorkis says she hasn't an hour to live at the outside, — wants you to come right down quick as you can come."

"Katharine," said Mr. Asbury, coolly, "this is our friend Mr. Page. Mr. Page, let me introduce you to my wife, Mrs. Asbury."

It was evident that the family had been summoned to "Dorkis's" death-bed so often that they were quite hardened to it, for they all went on eating as if nothing had happened.

"But I tell you she's in eminent danger this time, unquestionably. The *gangrene* [ganglion] of nerves same as before, only it takes a different shape; and 'twon't do to wait a minute. Seems if —"

Mr. Asbury did wait till he had eaten another egg; and Mrs. Asbury had time to take a full survey of the soon-to-be-bereaved Mr. Page. He had what is called a "pig-face," forehead and chin both retreating, and the long features were ridged up in the middle somewhat like the reflection of your own countenance in the bowl of a spoon. His hair was as flaxen as a child's, with a pinkish tint; he had a rosebud complexion; and his eyes might be called "baby-blue," both from their color and their expression. Was it possible that this man, whose whole appearance marked him as "none too bright," could be the husband of the intelligent woman who called last evening?

"Heaven help her," thought Mrs. Asbury. "I don't wonder she is a hypochondriac."

Mr. Asbury reached the house of mourning just in time to see his cousin Dorcas sipping a ghostly cup of coffee. She felt a little better now, but didn't know how long it would last. The walk last night had been too much for her; and worrying so about the bride's dark prospects had helped bring her down, she supposed.

Were the bride's prospects dark? The children were very anxious to make up their minds how they liked her; but did they ever wonder how she liked them, or what she thought of the town of Quinnebasset and the strange people she seemed destined to meet at every turn?

In the course of the forenoon Mrs. Hinsdale called. Mrs. Asbury had met her several times before; but none the less did she quail now as aunt Marian's stately figure crossed the threshold. Nicknames are inexcusable; but I am ashamed to say that Helen often spoke

of her own mother's sister as the "Inspector General." Aunt Marian was as straight as if she had been drilled at West Point; her voice was as commanding as her form; and her eyes saw everything, from the cobweb that floats on the ceiling to the grain of dust that creeps under the carpet. She was a clergyman's wife, and her husband was one of the most spiritual of men, — of the sort that are "half in heaven;" and partly for that very reason, perhaps, she had found it necessary to keep a strict watch of things below. In short, she called herself "eminently practical," and so she was, — and so nice withal, that Theresa Bumpus declared she had known her to "chase a fly two miles;" though this was going too far, and Miss O'Neil stoutly denied it.

She came now to make an unceremonious morning call, take a general survey of the house, and assure Mrs. Asbury that she stood always ready to be appealed to for advice. Mrs. Asbury knew it but too well, for, when visiting her old pupil Pauline Loring, last fall, she had learned even more than her husband had ever told her of Mrs. Hinsdale. She was not the favorite in Quinnebasset that she deserved to be. If she had had some glaring faults, which humbled her now and then, her people might have felt more drawn towards her; but she never needed forgiveness, never asked sympathy, was sufficient to herself, always right, and unfortunately right-angled too.

"I understand these children perhaps better than their father does, for he is gone from home a great deal. Helen is the odd one; she must resemble some of her father's family, for there isn't a bit of Dillingham about her. Sharly is very much admired; you'll like

Sharly. She is more practical than Helen, and, between you and me, my favorite. And now, Mrs. Asbury, if you ever feel perplexed as to what course to pursue, don't fail to call on me, for I have always had an oversight of the family, and a stranger like you must need advice."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Asbury, sweetly.

Human nature tires of constant instruction; and she found Mrs. Hinsdale much more tedious than Mrs. Page. What should she do to head off this threatened stream of "advice"?

"I'm glad she is one of the yielding sort," thought Mrs. Hinsdale. "I fancy I shall have just as much oversight of that family as I had before she came."

Mrs. Hinsdale considered herself a remarkable judge of character: she had read her new sister-in-law all through at one sitting.

There was another arrival before the breakfast dishes were washed. It was Theresa Bumpus. "I guess she's sick and tired o' sin," said the twins, quoting one of her speeches, as they saw her from the window. Helen was delighted; but dignity forbade her to express her feelings; and, besides, she might have come back for part of her wardrobe.

"Good morning, Theresa."

Nothing chilled Miss Bumpus like calling her Theresa. It was a tacit reproach to the whole Bumpus family, for they had dubbed her Thurzy, and what was good enough for them ought to be good enough for anybody. In hilarious moments the children addressed her as Sister Bumpus, in imitation of Mrs. Page, and nothing pleased her better than that.

"O, we're so glad to see you!" cried Sharly; "do take off your bonnet."

The returned prodigal did not avail herself of this permission, but stood bolt upright, looking deprecatingly at Helen.

"It's some of your father's work. He went for me this morning, and nothing would do but I must come back with him."

"Take a chair, Thurzy."

"Come now, Helen, you wait a minute, and I'll tell you what made me whisk off so quick yesterday. I caught sight of Oze Page going by in a mud-wagon, and I run of an idea —"

"Yes, we all saw you run."

Theresa laughed. "I run of an idea it was as cheap riding as walking, and so I off to the road like a shot off a shovel. You see, Helen, I expected you'd be a little crusty. You always suited me first rate, for there's no palaver about you; but you ought to consider that I'm an independent woman, and belong to a likely family; and, as Delia Liscom says, why ain't I good enough to set down at the table with anybody's folks?"

"There, there; we knew Peeky Liscom was at the bottom of it," cried the twins.

"You hardly ever do sit at the table with us," said Helen, "and never when papa is at home. You say you'd rather be scraping kettles at meal-times, for it helps on with the work."

"Well, I know it, and so it does; but I'm an independent woman, and I want to feel free to do as I'm a mind ter," said Thurzy, elevating her sled-runner nose. "And now I'll tell you how I happened to come back.

Your father's all for peace, you know: he needn't be accused of aristocracy, for he hain't got a grain of it; only folks that are so extra polite do appear kind of stiff. Well, he sounded *her* on the subject of eating with her help, and she said, 'All right, if they'd brush their hair, and put on a clean collar.' She never comes to the table herself without fixing up some, and all she asks is for a girl to be as particular as she is. Now, I call that fair and reasonable, and I on with my things and started."

"Sister Bumpus, you're coming to your senses, and I begin to like you again. Take off your bonnet. I'm so glad you've got back that I don't know what to do."

"Why, Helen, that sounds something like. And you just take your hands out of the dish-water — will you? I guess I'm capable of doing all there is to be done in this house, if Polly Pidge will only keep out of the way."

"Shall you put on three clean collars every single day?" queried the twins.

"Me? — no. Nobody'll get me to go to the table without I'm a mind ter. Has Erastus fed my cow? Look here; I want them egg-shells for my hens. You better believe I'm glad to get back, for I'm kind of attached to things round here, and I might as well own I was getting proper homesick. But I must go now and rig up some, for your father said he wanted to take me in and introduce me to *her*."

Another bridal call; but Mrs. Asbury was prepared to meet Miss Bumpus with great cordiality. She was considered the homeliest woman in Quinnebasset; twenty-four years old, raw-boned, square-shouldered, coarse-featured, with black hair growing too low on the

forehead, and shaggy eyebrows meeting above a long nose that turned up at the end rather unexpectedly. She was a rough-spoken woman, too; as unsusceptible of polish as a Virginia fence, or a blackberry bush. All this Mrs. Asbury saw; but her husband assured her, that, if she once knew Theresa's ways, had eaten of her pies and puddings, and felt the unspeakable comfort there was in her trustworthiness, she would forgive her uncouth appearance, and be satisfied and thankful to have her take up her abode in the house.

Mrs. Asbury believed it.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACK SHEEP.

JUBILEE HILL, May 9.

DEAR DI: She came, she saw, she conquered — everybody but me. She has been here now a month, and it keeps on just as it began. Sharly won't own it, but she's perfectly bewitched; the duet like her because she is so easy to laugh; and Sister Bumpus, because she is taking lessons in cooking. They all suppose I'm as much in love as they are, and that the reason I'm so sober is owing to a cold in my head. Mrs. Page thinks she's too good to live, and even aunt Marian says she has some "admirable points." Father considers her the "mirror of virtue and rose of delight," and she is to have her way in all things, because her way is always best. I say nothing, Di, but I don't like the way she came into this family any better than I did in the first place. O, I must tell you a pasquinade the twins got off the other day.

"Mamma, O, mamma! Van and I've been saying what pretty little feet and hands you have."

"Indeed! thank you, my dears."

"Yes," says Vic, who always clinches the nail after she drives it in, "and if folks have such beautiful feet and hands, it's no matter *how* their face looks. Helen thinks so, too."

That was too much for madam. She ran into the china closet to laugh, and the duet couldn't imagine what they had said that was funny. That china closet is her retreat whenever she can't keep her countenance; I never saw such a giggler. She seems to think Quinnebasset is the queerest place, and is always asking father about the people, as if they were perfect curiosities.

I don't believe I told you of Miss O'Neil's disappointment. Well, it was funny, her fancying father was in love with her; but she would never have thought of it if it had not been for that roguish Keller Prescott. She is as much as sixty years old, and had her head trepanned, and all the brains taken out before she left Ireland, and I say it's a shame to make fun of her; but they will do it. They told her that father wanted to propose to her, but was very diffident, and she must encourage him. So she beamed upon him at every nook and corner, though he hadn't the faintest idea what was in her mind. Of course he would shake hands with her when she stopped him in the street, and inquire politely about her neuralgia; and she began to think he was really getting ready to propose, when she heard of his engagement; and it was a dreadful blow. She was sure she had repulsed him by her coldness, and that made it all the harder to bear. She remembered that one day last fall, as he was passing her window, he had lingered and talked a little while, which certainly looked very much as if he were coming to the point; but alas, alas! she forgot to ask him in, and the words were never spoken. It seems too absurd to believe, Di, but she had actually told of this over and over again with a trembling voice.

"I never shall forget what a beautiful talk we had; and he was going to say something special, but I forgot to ask him into the house, and he never came again."

Father knows the story now, for it was too good to keep, and Silas Hackett, who is quite a wit, has composed a poem called "The Dirge of Norah O'Neil," to the tune of Lovely Fan: —

> "Had I but asked sweet William in,
> Sweet William in," &c., &c.

Well, Miss Norah was very slow about calling upon the bride; but she came last night, because she knew something was going on. It was my birthday, you know, and the Hinsdales were here, also the Prescotts, who are a sort of "button-hole relation," for Dr. Prescott's wife was a sister to uncle Charles Hinsdale. Miss O'Neil saw the extra lights, and came up, though she did have rather an injured look at first, and said she didn't see how strangers could bear to come to Quinnebasset in the spring of the year. Mrs. Asbury was very polite to her — she's a manager, I assure you, and the poor old soul thawed out after a while, and apologized for not having called before.

"I fell up the Hackett hill," said she, "and stuck a knot-hole into my eye; so I hope to be excused."

Her eye is still black and blue where the knot-hole hit it, and madam could do no less than grant pardon; but Keller Prescott almost convulsed us by going to the piano and striking up, on a low key, with a very mournful voice —

> "Had I but asked sweet William in," &c.

Mrs. Asbury started post-haste for the china closet then, but Dr. Willard made room for her behind the hall door; he is as inveterate a giggler as she is. Talk about young girls!

The twins had been laboring over a secret dish for supper, which turned out to be snow creams, after a recipe they had found in a newspaper. The creams looked nice, and the twins looked important; but one dip of the teaspoon dispelled the charm, for the mixture was as gritty as mortar. Nobody could eat it, and Miss O'Neil screamed out with neuralgia and rage. The duet were almost in tears, and I could not soothe them; but madam knew just what to say.

"I don't believe there is a clean piece of snow in Quinnebasset; and why shouldn't the creams be gritty? But the flavor is delicious."

They all said, "O, yes; so it was," and were so complimentary that the twins almost thought, if it were not for one's teeth, the dirt would be quite an improvement.

Then Miss O'Neil came out brilliantly with "a splendid receipt for custards," which caused much secret diversion — "three eggs and some milk."

Now for my presents, which Sharly brought in after tea on a salver: A gold chain from father, which didn't surprise me so much as it would have done if Mrs. Asbury hadn't told Sharly of it in Bel's hearing. She confesses that it is very hard for her to keep a secret. A volume of Daniel Maclise's pictures from Sharly, elegant, just elegant. A ring, and pin with mother's hair in it, from the twins; the lace set from you, — I wrote you a letter of thanks for that yesterday, and

ow I thank you again,— and various other things, too numerous to mention. But what do you think Mrs. Asbury gave me? — A landscape, in oil, by her nephew, Mr. Lynde, who stands very high, you say, as an artist. You wonder he should paint when he doesn't need the money; but, O, if you should see this picture! It is so beautiful that I meant to go to Mrs. Asbury privately, after the people were gone, and tell her how much I appreciate it; but I never can say anything in a roomful; you know my infirmity. And now, just think; father was offended by my coldness, and took me off into the entry, after supper, to reason with me.

"My daughter, couldn't you as much as say, 'Thank you, dear mother?'"

"Why, papa, I did say 'Thank you,' and I would have kissed her, only I can't bear a parade."

"Helen, you are almost rude to her, and she is an angel."

That repelled me in a minute. How it does set you against a body to hear her called an angel! You have the highest reverence for that class of beings, but you don't want them round in the family.

"I have always told your mother you are a very warm-hearted girl; but the moment she came, Helen, you turned into an icicle."

Tears rose to his eyes as he spoke, and I was so touched that I threw both arms round him, and said I, —

"O, papa, don't talk so. I'll bear anything for your sake."

That only made it worse, for he asked what I had to bear.

O, Di, Di, he was hugging me close, and pressing his dear, smooth shaven cheek to mine; but it seemed as if he had sent me ever so far off — you know that shut-out feeling; and I thought of Theresa's hateful ditty,

> "My mother's my mother all the days of her life,
> My father's my father till he gets a new wife."

I felt as if I had lost father and mother both, for since this stranger has come between us, papa does not understand me as he did before.

"Do you know that Miss Carver is a much-admired woman, and that she has sacrificed a great deal for your father and his children?"

"Yes, sir."

I dared not say what I thought — that she never would have done it if he had been a poor man.

"Then, Helen, it seems to me you could at least show a little gratitude to her for coming."

There, Di, did you ever hear the like of that, under all the circumstances? I was so surprised that I spoke right out, without stopping to reflect: —

"Gratitude, papa? Why, I couldn't help her coming, you know, and I'm trying to bear it cheerfully, but I never dreamed you expected me to be grateful!"

I didn't mean the least impertinence, I really didn't; but he took both hands off my shoulders, and looked at me sternly.

"Helen, you are an obdurate child, and try your mother's feelings so much that she really considers you a means of discipline."

O, Di, wasn't that dreadful? Then he said how

readily she had won the love of the rest of the children, how sweet and good Sharly had been, &c., &c., showing plainly enough that he didn't see that I had used every bit of my influence to quell the rising insurrection. I supposed he knew the children well enough to know I could turn them round my little finger, and would give me credit for keeping peace in the family; but he doesn't understand. O, Di, he never will understand. I have tried so hard to do right! I have yielded my own place, and my own plans and wishes, and have never said one murmuring word, except to you; yet my step-mother goes to my father and complains that I am a means of discipline! I was beginning to respect her, but my whole soul rises in indignation at this. If I was made for a discipline to Mrs. William Asbury, let me fulfil my mission. I can discipline her so that she'll become a saint upon earth. I have the power, and I'll use it. "Evil be thou my good."

Yours, dyed in the wool,

THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER VI.

"MANAGING."

"What shall he do that cometh after the King?"

"SISTER BUMPUS, what do you suppose folks are crying about this morning?" said Helen, a few days after this, with a conscious side glance at the spice-box. For the first time since her step-mother came, she had indulged in a "cutting remark." She had said something about a woman's "marrying for a home, and then complaining that the children were a discipline." The remark was quietly made, and indirect enough; no one need apply it that didn't feel guilty. It wasn't likely Mrs. Asbury was so sensitive as to take such a hint as that; still, Helen was uneasily curious to know what made her eyes so red.

Sister Bumpus was entirely in the dark, but answered at random, with a snap of the eye, —

"I can't justly tell you, Helen; but I kind o' mistrust she's been crying for your mother."

"What do you mean? She didn't know mother."

"That's nothing to do with it. If your mother hadn't died, though, there wouldn't have been any chance for a second wife, and poor Mrs. Asbury couldn't have got into this pew. That's what I mean by mourning for your mother."

"If she hain't wished her cake was dough more than once, I miss my guess."

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"She might have thought of that before," said Helen, doggedly.

"O, well, I suppose she looked for smooth sailing, — folks generally do, — but if she hain't wished her cake was dough more than once, I miss my guess," said Thurzy, with a reckless mixing of metaphors.

Helen turned and walked slowly out of the room. Thurzy condemned her — Thurzy, her stanch friend; she knew it by that indescribable cant of the head: and how was it with her own conscience? Did that condemn her also? Yet she had treated Mrs. Asbury with unfailing respect and politeness. O, always!

"Ah, my dear, stupid husband, you shouldn't have told Helen she is a discipline to me," said Mrs. Asbury, that evening, as they two were riding out after old "Dozey."

"Why not, my love? I want her to see her ingratitude in its proper light?"

He did not ask how she knew what he had said to Helen.

"Ingratitude? Pray, William, what has she to be grateful for?"

He turned towards her in surprise.

"Why, Katharine, didn't you leave a refined circle, and come here into the country to devote yourself to me and my children?"

"Well, what if I did? That is my affair, not Helen's; she was not consulted."

"Ah, well, no; perhaps not; but, my dear, she ought to be respectful."

"She treats me like a queen," said Mrs. Asbury, with an arch smile.

"I know it; and that is what I will not have — that iciness of manner. She must and shall show you some warmth of feeling."

"Now, now, my friend, don't ask that high-principled girl to play the hypocrite."

"Of course not, my dear; I simply want to bring her to her feelings."

"Please don't. Let her feelings come to her."

"They are 'lang o' comin',' Katharine."

"Never mind; I can wait."

"But, Katharine, you can't say her excessive reserve hasn't wounded you?"

Mrs. Asbury turned her head to look at a dog-tooth violet in a ditch by the wayside.

"I can say this, William: I shall always respect her for smoothing my way with the children. They were all aggrieved at my coming, and would have taken a dislike to me if it had not been for Helen."

"Impossible!"

"My dear husband, do you think I can't see? It was grand of Helen to do it when she dislikes me so much."

"But why should she dislike you, unless she is the most unreasonable of mortals?"

"Because it was a very happy family till I took it by stratagem, as a general takes a poor, undefended city. She was indignant, and I don't blame her one bit."

"Why, Katharine, my dear!"

Mrs. Asbury went on earnestly, —

"You assured me that she was a very peculiar girl. I don't agree with you. She is only very high-minded,

which I like. You said it was safest to take her by storm, and I consented; but begging your pardon, William, I now think you were entirely wrong."

Mr. Asbury looked rather uncomfortable. He had lacked the moral courage to tell Helen of his engagement, and had persuaded Miss Carver, entirely against her better judgment, into an earlier marriage than was at first intended.

"She thinks I was attracted by your wealth," went on Mrs. Asbury, her eyes twinkling a little. "I am too old to have married for love, she is very sure of that; and really, William, considering what a dunce of a man I have married, I begin to think myself it must have been the money — don't you?"

He laughed.

"Yes; either that or a 'halluzion of mind,' as Miss O'Neil calls it. The glamour of our youthful courtship blinded you again, Katharine, or I shouldn't be the fortunate man I am to-day."

"I'm glad you know you *are* a fortunate man, sir; for it shows there's no 'halluzion of mind' about *you!*"

"But what put it into Helen's head that you married for money?"

"Well, she knows I was a teacher, and she supposes I never saw you till last winter, when I visited Pauline Loring. And more than that, she has no doubt Pauline asked me here on purpose to bring it about."

"Preposterous!"

"She said so to her aunt Marian."

"But of course her aunt Marian told her better?"

"No; she thought proper to let it go. Mrs. Hins-

dale has been at great pains to conceal certain facts from the girls," added Mrs. Asbury, blushing.

"That isn't fair, my dear. I made love to you when you were in short dresses, and I presumed the girls knew all about it by this time. Helen ought to be told."

"No, William; I would rather she should not know."

"Why not, Katharine?"

"Because she holds her own mother's memory so precious, and guards it so jealously, that she would be deeply wounded to learn she was your second choice."

Mr. Asbury looked as if this was an entirely new idea to him.

"She has very high-flown notions on such matters," his wife went on. "Sharly might not mind, — I hardly think she would, — but Helen is decidedly romantic; and I'd rather bear a little contempt than have the dear girl fancy her own mother wasn't duly beloved."

"But she couldn't be so absurd."

"O, yes, she could; for I was quite as much so at her age. I remember how keenly I suffered in just that way, about my own father and mother, on hearing a story of that sort, which ought never to have been told me."

Mr. Asbury looked at his noble wife with new admiration. Here was a woman so magnanimous that to spare the feelings of a morbid young girl, she would allow herself to be misunderstood and undervalued. Why, it was marvellous! He had thought all along that he could never thank her for her charity to his naughty child; but now she had glorified Helen till he actually began to take a different view of her himself,

and appreciate her feelings as he had never done before. These young girls! Only God and their own mothers can really understand them; and few are the step-mothers with the keen insight and broad sympathy of Mrs. Katharine Asbury.

Helen wandered along the river-bank one day, abstracted and unhappy, looking at the willows with their little vapory touches of green, and plucking blood-root flowers with their loose, white petals.

"I know what she is like; she is like that creeper," said Helen. A fair, white birch stood, or tried to stand, near the water's edge, but was drawn downward in a lovely curve by a bittersweet vine. Her step-mother was like that vine, she thought, creeping round, and "managing" to spoil at last the unfortunate Asbury family. "But O, what a picture it would make! I mean to sketch it this very afternoon, and then paint it. It will be what I heard Mr. Lynde call a 'real picture,' for it expresses a thought. He said it was of no use painting a picture unless you had a thought to express."

Not long after this, Helen was seen, by the watchful Mrs. Hinsdale, with her hat awry on her head, dipping one of the oars in Pitkin Jones's pleasure-boat. Mr. Jones was always rowing young ladies up and down the river, and chancing to espy Helen on the river-bank, had taken her in out of pure gallantry.

"Do you know where Helen is?" said Mrs. Hinsdale, donning her bonnet, and going to Mrs. Asbury with the news. "Well, you ought to know. She is rowing the boat like a galley slave for that indolent Pitkin Jones. It really has quite a tomboy look; and,

Mrs. Asbury, you will allow me to say that you *must* keep a stricter watch over that girl!"

Then it was that Mrs. Asbury's courage rose to do the thing she had contemplated ever since she entered the family. She looked up at the "Inspector-General" with a smile on her trembling lips like sunlight on troubled water, and said, gently, —

"My dear Mrs. Hinsdale, may I ask a little favor of you? Will you please leave the management of the children to their father and myself?"

Mrs. Hinsdale drew back her stately figure in surprise.

"I wish to live in harmonious relations with you, Mrs. Hinsdale; so I thought it as well to tell you in the beginning that I have just that sort of temper which will not brook interference."

Mrs. Hinsdale positively winced. This from the meek woman she had promised to "advise"!

"Do you mean to say I am not to express an opinion in regard to the conduct of my own sister's children?" said she, as soon as she could recover her speech.

"O, yes; you may write me notes," replied Mrs. Asbury, in the same smiling manner, though her lips had ceased to tremble. "Write your criticisms, Mrs. Hinsdale, — you needn't spare me, — and I promise I will ponder your words well. But please don't come and upbraid me to my face; for if you do, I'm so afraid I shall be angry, and then we shall both be sorry! Do you understand me, Mrs. Hinsdale? Will you shake hands upon it, and be friends?"

Mrs. Hinsdale had shaken hands before she fairly comprehended what it all meant — had bound herself

over to keep the peace before she reflected what it would cost her.

"I had no idea she was that sort of woman," thought she, inwardly chafing at this strange bargain as she walked home; "but I shan't fail to write notes; for we all have a duty to perform, and I feel that mine is as clear as day."

Mrs. Asbury did have a persuasive way with her, and Helen thanked her for out-generaling aunt Marian, though how it had been done she could not imagine. The two ladies were on the most friendly terms, and pretty little notes passed between them on the daintiest of French paper; it was "touchingly sentimental;" so Helen told Sharly.

If madam was a "manager," her management seemed to work for the household good. When Mr. Asbury complained that Helen's plants were in the way, she suggested making more elbow-room by throwing out a bay window from the front parlor towards the garden. This improvement won great applause; and the enterprising lady made another venture, and let the china closet into the back parlor by a large Gothic archway, hung with damask curtains. Dishes gave place to books, the one little west window lengthened itself to the floor, and for the first time in its life the back parlor was illumined by the setting sun.

Helen was so delighted with the sunsets and the bay window, that, in a glow of gratitude, she brought down the sacred ivy, and let it adorn the walls once more.

"O, that is so lovely!" said Mrs. Asbury, much gratified.

"The children want it down here; I thought I would please them," said Helen, determined not to be too gracious.

Mrs. Asbury sighed softly. She did not know that Helen had been on the point of kissing her; that, in truth, the girl was becoming afraid of herself.

"Am I really going to love this woman? No, O, no; she shan't 'manage' *me!*"

CHAPTER VII.

BITTERSWEET.

ONE afternoon in August, Helen sat in the attic, directly under the skylight, giving a last touch of varnish to a framed painting.

"Why, how warm it is up here!" cried Vic, stealing upon her unannounced. "There's a gentleman in the parlor wants to see you."

"Vic, dear, this is my den; you shouldn't come in without knocking."

"Well, you forgot to lock the door. I s'pose you don't care who it is that wants to see you — do you?"

"Well, who is it?"

"O, you mustn't ask, for I promised not to tell. Maybe it's only aunt Marian."

"You said a gentleman."

"Well, it is a gentleman, then, with blue eyes and light *wooling* pants."

"Mr. Jones?"

"Poh! I guess Mr. Jones doesen't kiss mother! Helen, where did you get that beautiful picture?"

It was the white birch and bittersweet draped in a tangle of green leaves.

"I painted it myself, Chickie; how do you like it? It's papa's birthday present."

"Why, it's just gorgeous! Let me carry it down to the parlor and show it to Mr. Lynde."

"What, Mr. Morris Lynde; is he here?"

"There, now, I didn't mean to tell! But he came half an hour ago. Acts real nice, only sick; and he asked for a glass of milk, and Thurzy skimmed it off, half cream."

Helen had turned quite pale.

"Dear me," thought she, as the scene in Mrs. Satterlee's conservatory rose before her, "how my tongue did run that night! and how shocked he looked! I can seem to see him waving me back from the door-knob. There, I've a great mind not to go down, only the whole family will be after me bodily if I don't."

By the time she had taken off her gingham apron and reached the parlor door, the color had come back to her cheeks.

"This is Helen, our oldest daughter, whom you met in Boston," said Mrs. Asbury. "And, Helen, this is my nephew, Morris Lynde — your cousin, if you choose. Little Bel has claimed him already, you see."

"Very glad to meet my cousin Helen," said Mr. Lynde, slipping Bel off his knee and rising with courtly politeness. But Helen fancied there was a roguish look in his eye.

It was an eye to be remarked; deep blue, set around with an amber-colored fringe, which gave a sunshiny effect to the whole face. His hair, too, was amber-colored, his complexion singularly fair, his features long and nervous, with a decidedly spiritual expression; but a certain humorous curve under the eye showed, beyond a doubt, that he did not live in the clouds.

He shook hands with Helen so cordially that she hoped he had forgotten that miserable talk.

"Well, Miss Helen, so this is Jubilee Hill? I should call it Blew Hill, for the wind almost blew my hat off as I climbed up. You don't always have such a gale?"

"O, no, indeed, sir; it was just whistling to give you a welcome."

"Yes, Morris, it is a very hospitable place here, as you will find," said Mrs. Asbury, smiling.

"Thank you for that, aunt Katharine, for I'm likely to tax its hospitality considerably."

Thurzy caught the words as she passed by the parlor door.

"So he's going to stop quite a spell, is he? Look here, Sharly, what has he done with his luggage?"

"I don't know," replied Sharly, who had stolen into the kitchen to eat "vanities." "Perhaps he has left it at the hotel."

"Sure enough. He don't look like one of the 'cousining' kind, and I guess he has. Do you know what ails him? He looks dreadful slim."

"Something happened to him in the army, and he never got over it,' said Sharly, with her mouth full.

"And never will, to my thinking. Appears to be booked for the grave, and I guess he's prepared to go, though that may be because he's so light-complected — it does give anybody such a pure look; but I never heard as a fair skin is any sign of grace. There, child, don't go and spoil your appetite for supper. Hain't you got a sweet tooth, though?"

When Mr. Asbury came home to tea he found he had stumbled upon a little festival. The house over-

flowed with flowers, his wife and children were in their court dresses, and he overheard Helen saying to Mrs. Asbury, —

"Mother always had the waffles sugared before they came to the table; father likes them better that way."

Then it occurred to him that it was somebody's birthday; and while he was going through a formal introduction to Mr. Lynde, he recollected that it was the 17th of August, and he was forty-five years old.

"Didn't we steal a march on you, papa?" cried the twins; "we were so afraid mamma would let it out, and she almost did to-day noon."

Mr. Lynde thought he had never seen a pleasanter family group. Mr. Asbury interested him at once. He had the tired, bloodless look of a man who overworks his brain, and his hair was too gray for his years; but, as Helen said, "the frost had not struck in," and a more genial host it would be hard to find. Mr. Lynde wondered if the harassed expression which came over his face from time to time was all due to the perplexities of law business, or whether there was any truth in the report that he had risked a large amount of money in a brilliant speculation which was likely to fail.

Sharly's beauty was a marvel. There was always the loveliest pink in her cheeks; not soft and variable like other people's, but as hard and steady as the hue of a ruby. It was strange; but, sick or well, Sharly was never pale.

Helen had no settled color.

> "A woman of the gods, divinely tall,
> And (sometimes) most divinely fair."

You could never depend upon her looks in the least. She was what Sharly rather slightingly termed "one of your evening beauties;" and Mr. Lynde, who had never seen her before, except by gas-light, did not find her as pretty as he expected. Her clear, colorless brunette complexion was a little dull just now, and so were her eyes, which needed excitement to give them fire and expression. Sharly's blue eyes were always bright and keen; by daylight or candle-light she was the prettiest young girl in town.

Mr. Lynde was disappointed in Helen's manner, as well as her looks. Her frankness and originality had amused him last winter; but there seemed to be an unfavorable change in her. Her face was impassive, her manner restrained; and he observed that his aunt was in the habit of looking at her before speaking, as if to make sure that what she was going to say would strike the right chord.

"The supercilious, disagreeable child," he thought, indignantly. "There is power in her, and I can't help admiring it, but if she makes Aunt Katharine's position here an uncomfortable one, I'm her enemy to the death."

There was a deal of character-reading going on at that social supper table. The host, with his observant, professional eyes, had been reckoning up Mr. Lynde, and had already settled it that he was a man of strong common sense, but that there was some trouble on his mind. It might possibly be owing to bad health, or some worry about pictures, but there was a shade of care on his brow, which a young man with his position in life ought not to wear.

"You and I should not call each other strangers, Mr. Lynde," said Mr. Asbury, with a cordial smile. "I bid you a hearty welcome to Jubilee Hill, and hope you will make yourself quite at home with us. Katharine, can't you take him around, and show him some of our scenery? You and the girls might make up picnics, but unfortunately I must be left out, as business is very pressing just now."

"Little Beech Hill," suggested Mrs. Asbury.

"Old Bluff," cried the twins.

"Elephant Rock," put in Sharly.

"Yes, papa," said Helen, graciously, "we'll take him to Mount Haze, and Mount Blue, and all those dignitaries up there; and then, when he's tired of sublimity, we'll show him someting quiet, like Paradise Lane, and the Arcade."

"Thank you, with all my heart," responded Mr. Lynde. "I shall have to write my physician that he has lost his patient, for who wouldn't get well on mountain air, and Jersey cream, and country hospitality?"

"O, yes," said Helen, "it will help you only to look at the scenery. There are miles and miles of mountains, and no end of ponds; you never saw such a place for views as it is in and around Quinnebasset."

When Helen grew enthusiastic Mr. Lynde liked her again. He thought he should enjoy going with her to favorite resorts, if only to see her face light up so brilliantly.

After supper the presents were brought in, and Mr. Asbury received them in such a graceful and appreciative way, that his guest was delighted with him. No matter what he took up, it was perfect in his eyes, and

as well adapted to his wants as the glass slipper to Cinderella's foot. Last of all came the picture from Helen.

"Come here, my darling, and kiss me. Did you really paint this beautiful picture for papa? It warms my heart to hear that."

Helen's heart warmed, too, and she embraced her father with all the old freedom of manner which had been wanting of late. Nobody could give such sweet kisses as papa Asbury. Great tall man as he was, his mouth was small and delicately shaped, and all the nicer for *wanting* a mustache.

"Mr. Lynde, you are an artist. What do you think of my picture?"

Helen had dreaded this.

"O, you mustn't ask him, father. Please don't come a step nearer, Mr. Lynde. It isn't nicely done at all, for I don't know how to lay on the paints."

"Don't be too modest, my dear. You have done that silver poplar and woodbine so well that I should know them with my eyes shut."

Poor Helen! who had meant them for white birch and bittersweet! And there were Mr. Lynde and Mrs. Asbury, both good critics, looking on in silence. She wished she had never brought the picture out of the attic.

"Is it original?" asked Mrs. Asbury, presently.

"Yes'm; that is, it was sketched from nature."

"Then I call it good. What do you say, Morris? She has taken lessons only one term."

"Very cleverly done for a beginner, Aunt Katharine; and begging Mr. Asbury's pardon, I should call that tree a white birch, and the vine a bittersweet."

"Would you? O, would you?" said Helen, pleased and shy. "I'm so glad!"

"There is more than sky and foliage in the picture; there is real poetic feeling."

"Do you mean by that that I had an idea in my mind?"

"Yes, an idea."

"Well, so I had, in the first place; but after I had painted a while I hadn't — I — I — "

Helen looked at her mother, then dropped her eyes in confusion. Of course she could not go on and explain her "idea," and it now seemed to her an inexpressibly foolish one. Mrs. Asbury a parasite, a kill-joy, a creeper! It made her feel more guilty than ever to meet her gentle, unsuspecting eyes, and it thrilled her, too, with something so like grateful affection that she had to say to herself, sternly, "I won't love her — I will not!"

Mr. Asbury was well read in Blackstone, but knew no more of art than Baby Bel.

"I shall prize Helen's picture all the more since it is approved by such good judges," said he; "but what you mean by 'poetic feeling,' is past my comprehension. That tree is a tree, and that sky is a sky, to my thinking; and I can't make any more out of it, unless there's a thunder-storm coming up in the west."

Sharly thought as her father did, but kept silent.

"Helen takes her gift from her mother's side of the house; she is all Dillingham, let her aunt Marian say what she will. Who knows, daughter, but you'll be an artist one of these days?"

"O, papa, there isn't the least remarkability about

me. Don't think so, please don't," said Helen, quite ashamed. Mr. Asbury *was* a little weak in regard to his children.

"Never mind what you think of your talent, Puss. It's for the rest of us to decide as to that. Let us see, Mr. Lynde. If you are to stay with us a few weeks, perhaps you could give our little girl a few hints now and then. She says it is laying on the paints that perplexes her, you see."

Mr. Asbury spoke from the impulse of the moment, without suspecting that his request bordered on rudeness. The guest responded, as in duty bound, that teaching Helen would give him much pleasure; and the young girl, deeply chagrined, could do nothing but repeat, again and again, "Now, please don't, papa; please don't, papa!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. PAGE'S "DESPAIR FITS."

"I wept when I was born,
And every day shows why."

"DO you suppose he is really sick?" asked Sharly of Helen; "or is it only his mind?"

For something troubled Mr. Lynde. Mrs. Asbury had told the girls as much as that, which was very injudicious, since she was not willing to tell them any more.

"O, I dare say it's his mind; a love affair, of course;" replied Helen, who believed that broken hearts cause most of the misery of human life.

"And perhaps she died," suggested Sharly. "It isn't likely she refused him, he's so nice."

"Or perhaps her father interfered," returned Helen, reflectively. "I rather mistrust it must be some southern lady, for the trouble came when he was in the army."

"Shouldn't wonder. I mean to catch mamma sometime, Helen, when she isn't on her guard, and get the whole story. You know how funny she is about letting out secrets."

Helen frowned upon this unprincipled course; but there is no law against weaving romances, even out of

the thinnest material, and the girls already looked upon Mr. Lynde as the hero of a very interesting affair of the heart. He never seemed thoughtful, but they pitied him for something, they did not know what.

"Well, you may depend upon one thing," said Sharly. "Delia Liscom will find it out, whatever it is."

Delia Liscom was his landlady. The girls could not remember that they had ever seen her younger by a wrinkle; but in days of yore, Delia had been quite a belle, and still had the remains of a certain coarse beauty, — bright, bold, black eyes, scanty blonde hair, fair complexion, the thinnest possible lips, and a sharp nose slightly crooked. She was very short and rather fleshy, but an energetic little body, fully capable of carrying on her own business and that of everybody else in town. Nothing was so high or so low, so deep or so sacred, but she usually contrived to peep into it with the aid of her eye-glass; so that the naughty little Asburys called her "Peeky Liscom," and Silas Hackett, "the Peripatetic Quinnebasset News."

Mr. Lynde found her the best little landlady in the world; but when he declared, as he often did, "you are *too* kind, Miss Liscom," he meant exactly what he said, for her unremitting care and oversight jarred upon his nerves. He never went to sun himself on the balcony, but she followed with a camp-chair; he never started for his aunt Katharine's, but she levelled her eye-glass at him, and exclaimed, "Don't fatigue yourself, — now don't, Mr. Lynde."

He had been in town three days, when he and his aunt and cousins began their carryall excursions, going

out in the morning, — as many of them as old Dozey could draw, — and coming back in the evening with tired limbs and an empty picnic basket.

This sounded very inviting to Delia; and she was determined to go too, once in a while, if she could bring it about adroitly; for Mr. Lynde's patient face, his winning smile, and careless grace had deeply impressed her, and, more than that, he was sick, and she did not like to trust him out of her sight.

The first excursion was to Old Bluff, a mountain which hangs defiantly over the modest blue river, throwing its unwieldy shadow almost from shore to shore. There were five souls in all, counting Bel, in the large, old-fashioned carryall, but the expedition was doomed to be a failure.

> "They had ridden scant a mile,
> A mile out of the toune,"

when they were overtaken by Mr. Page, riding after them in a wagon, breathless, hatless, his light childish hair flowing in the wind, his baby-blue eyes rolling and imploring.

"Dorkis was unquestionably dying; left Delia Liscom with her; didn't think she would live an hour, at the outside. Most gone, seems if — "

"O, I do wish she'd stop dying," whispered Vic to the other half of the twins; "it's a shame, just as we were going to have a good time!"

Mrs. Asbury had been trying for weeks to discover the cause of Mrs. Page's "despair fits," and had observed that they always came on directly after her husband had said or done something particularly foolish.

She began to think Ozem was a sort of magnet that called up all her hidden diseases.

Delia Liscom stood at the front door, shading her eyes with her hand, and making a comical face. "Still living," said she, as the carryall stopped at the gate. "She wants to deliver her dying message to Mrs. Asbury in private; but I'll wait here in the parlor till all is over, so I can help to lay her out."

"Poor soul! she is greatly to be pitied," said large-hearted Mrs. Asbury, as she passed Miss Liscom, and entered the bedroom.

The worst was over; but Mrs. Page was still struggling for breath, and lay upon the bed helpless and white, with a strange glitter in her eyes.

"O, my dear friend, I wanted to see you," said she, looking up at Mrs. Asbury appealingly. "It is my soul that is sick, and nobody understands it! If I could talk to you, I think I should feel better."

Then in broken words the poor creature poured out a wretched story about Ozem, which Delia Liscom had been so kind as to tell her that morning. The whole village was laughing, so Delia said, at his simplicity. He was sheriff, and during court it was one of his duties to see that some clergyman was present who should make a prayer; but Mr. Hinsdale was out of town now, and, in his absence, Ozem had gone to the Rev. Mr. Spaulding, and said, "Will you open the court with prayer this morning? It will be two dollars." Of course Mr. Spaulding was amused at this unceremonious mixture of religion and business; but as if that were not funny enough, Ozem had followed the astonished divine out of court as soon as the prayer

was over, saying, in a whisper loud enough to be heard by everybody, "Here's your two dollars, Mr. Spaulding." "The judge couldn't keep his face straight, so Delia told me," sobbed Mrs. Page. "I never should have heard of it, if it hadn't been for her. She thinks I haven't any feeling, and I'm too proud to let her see how I suffer. But the truth is, Mrs. Asbury, I know my husband isn't like other people, just as well as you do!"

Mrs. Asbury did not know what reply to make.

"It is a queer thing to talk about, and I don't know what you'll think, but I must speak to somebody. O, Mrs. Asbury, what can a woman do that has married a fool?"

"She must try to accept his simplicity as a fixed fact, I suppose, and not fret about it," replied Mrs. Asbury, rather perplexed.

"Yes, but I can't always accept it. It wears the life out of me, and then I scold the poor man for what he can't help, and wear *him* all out; and then I humble myself before the Lord, and beseech for forgiveness. While I had my children with me I could bear it; but now, little Henry is dead, and my oldest boy is in California, and I've nothing to live for; and O, it is dreadful!"

As she spoke, they could hear Ozem by the window, telling somebody it was "a *gangrene* of the nerves."

"There, I've told him *ganglion* a hundred times, but he can't remember. He wasn't like this when I married him, Mrs. Asbury. Did you ever hear what Dr. Prescott says of the Page family?"

"No."

"Well, he is a droll man to express himself. He says the Pages haven't spunk enough to hold on to their brains. Their brains begin to decay or soften when they are about thirty years old. It was just so with all Ozem's brothers, and he had three. I wouldn't have you think now, that Ozem was always like this. He was tolerably bright when I married him, though not my equal, if I do say it, and everybody opposed the match."

"But you loved him?"

Mrs. Page's sallow cheeks crimsoned.

"No; that is the very iniquity of it, Mrs. Asbury. I had been cruelly disappointed a little before that, and was despairing and faithless. I said I would accept the very next offer, and I did. Yes, I did, and this is my punishment; but O, it is greater than I can bear!"

The conference was a long one, for Mrs. Asbury would not leave the unhappy woman till she was in a better frame of mind, though she knew it was growing too late for the expedition to Old Bluff.

Meanwhile Miss Liscom had thrown open the blinds in Mrs. Page's parlor, and was entertaining the carry-all party.

"And so you were going on a picnic? There's nothing I like better than picnics. Isn't it charming to ramble in the woods, Mr. Lynde, so picturesque — so —"

Delia was a practical little woman, and always lost her way when she attempted the sublime.

"So delightsome!" added she, looking insinuatingly at the party. "I do so enjoy picnics. I trust you don't mean to be exclusive, Helen?"

Helen was straightforward and truthful, not at all a woman of the world; and Mr. Lynde wondered how she would meet this question. She hesitated a moment.

"O, you don't call *five* exclusive — five and little Bel?" said she, trying to look at Miss Liscom with an innocent stare. The stare was too innocent altogether, and Miss Liscom saw at once that Helen was determined not to take the hint. She was baffled, very much to Mr. Lynde's amusement; but he knew very little about her if he supposed this would be her last attempt to "go excursing," as the girls called it. After a long while Mrs. Asbury returned to the parlor.

"Well, shall I begin upon the robe?" asked Delia, with mock solemnity. Though she was Mrs. Page's sister in the church, she considered her fair game, and never hesitated to hold her up to ridicule, though usually in a good-natured way, for Delia was not malicious.

"Mrs. Asbury," continued Delia, as Mr. Lynde went out to unfasten the horse, "now I am just ugly enough to think she could help acting in this way. I know I would control myself if I was in her place."

"Very likely you would and could, Miss Liscom, for you are not in the least like Mrs. Page, and I dare say weak nerves are not your besetting sin."

The words were spoken so gently that Delia never dreamed of a double meaning, but there was one, nevertheless.

"Heaven have charity for the uncharitable," thought Mrs. Asbury, as she entered the carryall.

CHAPTER IX.

OLD BLUFF.

"OGOODY, you couldn't shoot *that* biscuit through a gun!" exclaimed Vic, who stood by the kitchen table, overlooking her mother's preparations for another basket picnic. This remark would seem to imply that Mrs. Asbury's cooking was not always a success; but she smiled good-naturedly, and helped Helen spread the light cream biscuits.

"Mamma," cried Van, coming in from the barn, looking like crazy Ophelia, with straws in her hair, "you said you wanted some eggs to boil; but aren't dropped eggs just as good as boiled ones? Because I've dropped two of these on the barn floor, all to smash."

Mrs. Asbury laughed, which Helen thought was slightly undignified. If the twins were to be encouraged in such efforts at wit, there would soon be an end of maternal authority. The new mamma was certainly "very easy," as Mrs. Hinsdale said; no wonder the children liked her.

Mrs. Page had no return of dying symptoms, and the tourists reached Old Bluff this time without any hinderance. It was a stern, barcheaded peak, with a heart of rock, and few were the flowers which dared

show their soft faces above it. It was chiefly the hardy wintergreen, and reckless little twigs of pine and spruce, which huddled together along its sides, with a few tall evergreens at the summit.

The vanishing view of a snake, as they alighted from the carriage, shook all the color out of Sharly's lips, but her cheeks remained as red as ever.

"Look at her, Mr. Lynde," said Helen; "isn't it odd?"

"Yes; I never saw cheeks of a perfectly fast color before; they are 'the land of cherry isle,' most surely."

Then, as they walked slowly up the mountain, Mr. Lynde stopped on the way to answer some of Helen's questions about rocks, and to amuse the children by what he called "The Feldspar's Story," read from a piece of feldspar he held in his hand, beginning, "It is with a heavy heart I rise to address you."

This story won great applause from the twins; and Helen said, "Thanks, Mr. Lynde;" but Sharly, "Ever so much obliged, cousin Morris," with her sweetest smile.

"Miss Helen, see how much more gracious your younger sister is to me than you are. She never calls me Mr. Lynde."

Helen did not know what to say. She had no idea of adopting the man as cousin; it was altogether too much of a concession. She had never yet addressed Mrs. Asbury as "mother," though she was obliged to use the word "mamma" in speaking about her to the children, or they would be full of questions and suspicions.

"I know Mr. Lynde thinks I'm stiff and cold-hearted," thought Helen, "but I can't help it."

He did think her stiff, and strangely changed from the bright girl he had met in Boston; but not cold-hearted. Any one who saw her with her sisters could never think that. It amused him to see her put on the Lady Lofty air in climbing the mountain, and he was tempted to tease her.

"Miss Helen," said he, overtaking her with an effort which put him a little out of breath, "what do you consider the worst name you ever heard in your life for a woman?"

Helen considered a moment, then answered, with decision, "Phebe."

"Phebe? Well, then, Phebe you shall be, as long as you call me Mr. Lynde."

"O, now, Mr. Lynde!"

"Well, Phebe, I want to ask you what you suppose your air and figure reminded me of just now?"

"I don't know, sir; something dreadful, I suppose."

"Of a walking doll behind a carriage."

They all laughed, the comparison was so obvious; and Bel, who had a walking doll at home, began to imitate its movements, but fell on her face, and had to be carried the rest of the way in a lady's chair.

Helen was a little piqued, but kept her good-nature; and when they reached the top of the mountain, where they could sit on the rocks carpeted with an army blanket, and behold the lovely blue of four ponds, and the peaceful white of five villages, she forgot everything in her enjoyment of the grand repose of nature.

"I can see old Dozey down there," said Sharly, whose

imagination never took a very high flight, "and I can see his harness airing on a tree."

"He is having a good time," said Mrs. Asbury, taking her turn at using the opera-glass; "I always thought Dozey had an eye for scenery."

"Please let me look," said Vic; "he's eating grass."

"That is the way he enjoys his bits of nature," remarked Mr. Lynde. "A penny for your thoughts, Phebe."

"I was only thinking how your vexations vex you less and less the farther up you get. I'd like to meet all my trials on the top of a mountain, *Mr. Lynde*."

"What are some of them, Phebe, if one may ask?"

"O, I have plenty, sir."

"One is her hair — I know as much as that," said Sharly, as it came tumbling down like a black waterfall, — beautiful, curling, *wild* hair, which it cost nice Helen a world of trouble to keep in order.

"It's like Liberty," said she, blushing, as all eyes turned to see her fasten up the refractory locks, —

> "'Nets and pins cannot confine it,
> Nor combs its dreadful wildness tame.'"

Mr. Lynde thought it almost a pity the attempt should be made.

"Well, some more of your troubles, Phebe?"

"I sometimes meet with impertinent people who call me names," laughed she.

"That's a shame, Phebe. I would put a stop to it if I were you."

"Call him cousin Morris, why don't you? That's what he means," said Vic, in a loud whisper.

Helen laughed again. It is hard to sustain one's dignity in the presence of chattering children.

"Well, sir, one of my bothers is trying to like people that I ought to like, but can't."

"She means aunt Marian," said Sharly.

"No, ma'am, I don't."

Mrs. Asbury stooped to pluck up a sprig of evergreen. She did not quite think Helen alluded to herself, but a wounded heart bleeds at a touch.

"Mr. Lynde," continued Helen, unconsciously, "I want to ask *you* one question now: Isn't it natural for us to dislike some people? And how are we going to help it?"

"Not so fast. You were to ask but one question, Phebe. Yes, there are involuntary attractions and repulsions; it's of no use denying it, when plants have them as well as ourselves."

"Plants?" said Mrs. Asbury.

"Yes, aunt; florists have told me there are flowers which turn away from certain other flowers with what seems like antipathy."

"There, I'm glad to hear of that," said Helen, as Vic danced out of hearing, "for now I shan't think I'm to blame for wanting to run when I see Delia Liscom."

Mrs. Asbury turned suddenly and kissed Bel with a relieved smile, which did not escape the quick eye of her nephew.

"I wonder if that girl knows she is continually paining the noblest heart that ever beat?" thought he, puncturing a sorrel leaf with a pine needle. "I must have a little plain talk with her, even if she does consider it an impertinence."

An opportunity did not offer very soon, for though they took daily rides, he never saw Helen alone more than a minute at a time. The weather was almost perfect through August, and the sick man revelled in sunshine and mountain air, but his loving aunt watched in vain for the return of any color to his cheeks.

"When the dear boy entered the army he gave himself away," said she, tearfully; "and I am afraid the sacrifice has been accepted; still, if he must die, I know he will say it is sweet to die for one's country."

He did not look or appear like a doomed man. He had that sort of defiant hopefulness which laughs at "symptoms," and will not yield till the grim enemy actually appears.

"I don't give it up yet, aunt Katharine. All the doctors' warnings in Christendom can't kill me, and I intend to live as long as the Lord pleases."

He sometimes allowed Bel to pull a string under the lining of his coat, which instantly set him to squeaking like a wooden toy; and this, Mrs. Page thought, was rather light-minded for a man with one foot in the grave; but, in the words of the old hymn, Mr. Lynde did not "believe in death," he believed in everlasting life; so I dare say he would have kept on amusing the children if he had known it was his last day upon earth.

"And *I* don't see the least harm in it, Sister Page," said Sister Bumpus. "You always was rather dyspeptic in religion. He has done me a sight of good. I'll say that for him, taking those young ones away from under my feet when I'm making preserves."

Sometimes Mr. Lynde felt like sketching a little, but

oftener like reposing upon his army blanket, his hat shading his eyes, while he looked over the hills and far away, with an intent gaze which seemed almost to penetrate the invisible. Helen wondered what he was thinking about, but dared not watch him too closely, for he was evidently carrying on a double action of the mind, and, however deep in thought, never failed to see and hear everything that passed on around him. He was always ready to overlook the girls at their sketching, for Sharly wanted instruction as well as Helen; but it was soon evident that she had no eye, — though the pretty creature was loath to believe it. Wasn't she quicker and more adroit than Helen at everything she undertook? To be sure. Why, Helen couldn't even learn to make tatting, and the idea of her taking the lead in drawing! Sharly was scandalized. She could scratch off a whole landscape while Helen was pegging away at a tree; and as for any difference in the pictures, Sharly privately thought her own had more freedom of touch.

It was a habit with all her teachers to praise Sharly, and when Mr. Lynde kindly called her attention to the fact that her houses leaned, and her ferns and thistles were as tall as her trees, she surprised him by bursting into tears.

"I never heard of perspective before," said she. "Helen took lessons in Boston, but I didn't."

"No, indeed," said Helen, coming to the rescue; "but, Mr. Lynde, you will be surprised to see how she will learn when she once takes the idea. There, now, let's put away our sketch-books and go after flowers. Sharly is a great deal better botanist than I am."

Sharly's tears were soon dried, but the charm of drawing was completely spoiled for her, and she never wanted to touch another pencil. Moreover, she felt aggrieved if Helen attempted to sketch, and assured her privately that it was really shabby of her to take up so much of cousin Morris's time.

"He is the nicest cousin we ever had, and you keep him away from the rest of us, for you know he won't leave you when you are drawing, and it spoils all our fun to have you sit so still leaning against a stump, and Morris on the grass with his hat over his eyes," said she, her mouth drawing down in a grieved arc, which brought out two very pathetic dimples at the corners. She had two sets of dimples: one in the middle of her cheeks for laughter, the other lower down for tears.

"Why, you precious child! I had no idea you felt so about it; but just let me finish this one sketch of Medumscott Pond, and then I'll be good, and race and talk all the time," said Helen, ashamed of her own selfishness, and never dreaming it was Sharly who was selfish, for the two upper dimples began to play then in the most bewitching manner, and Sharly was her own sweet self again.

One morning, Mr. Lynde, Helen, Sharly, Vic, and Van were at Paradise Lane, a mile or two from home; the twins were geologizing in a hollow, Sharly reading a novel under a tree, and Helen sitting at a little distance, bending over some work.

"May I see your sketch, Phebe?" said Mr. Lynde, coming up to her and looking over her shoulder.

"O, I'm only mending an apron for Vic. What a—

fall was that, my countrymen, out of the cherry-tree just now, and what a rent it made in the calico! You see, Mr. Lynde, I've grown so experienced, that I always bring my needlework in my pocket nowadays."

"But your sketch-book — where is that?"

"At home. I've finished the view of Medumscott Pond."

"Yes; but this arcade," said Mr. Lynde, pointing to a bower of trees; "you know we were both going to sketch it."

Helen cast a longing look at the interlaced branches of birch and elm.

"Yes, and I do want to try it. I meant to; but if I once put my mind on a sketch, I can't think of anything else for the day, and it makes it very stupid for the children. I believe I mustn't try to draw any more, Mr. Lynde."

"I don't see but the children are having a good time, Phebe. I left them a minute ago making a stone grotto."

"Yes, indeed; the twins can always amuse themselves together. I wouldn't give it up for them, of course; but I — I - - After all, I think, as I said, that I mustn't draw any more, Mr. Lynde," said she, growing confused under his gaze, for she was afraid she had betrayed Sharly, and he would think, just what he did think, that she was the hinderance.

"The little tyrant!" said he to himself; and then aloud, to relieve Helen's embarrassment, "Are you never going to call me cousin Morris? Or are you beginning to like the name of Phebe?"

"Mr. Lynde," said Helen, summoning her courage, "I suppose I might as well explain that, and be done with it. I don't think it would be consistent for me to call you cousin Morris, when I don't call your aunt mother — now do you?"

"O, is that all?" said he, smiling at her earnestness. Helen's earnestness was what he greatly admired in her. "I'm so relieved to find you don't intend a personal slight. 'Consistency, thou art a jewel.' But why not call my aunt mother? — you like her so much!"

"Did you ask that as a question, sir?"

"No; I simply made an assertion."

"But who told you I liked her, Mr. Lynde?"

"Nobody. I can see for myself that you are beginning to love her, Phebe."

Without looking up, Helen plucked some arbutus leaves, and sewed them together with her needle and thread.

"It was very hard for you at first, for she reminded you of one of these creeping vines, you know, that kill the heart of a tree."

"Why, there now! did you see that in the picture I painted for father — did you, really?"

"No; I saw it in your face."

"Well, I wasn't going to talk about this to you, Mr. Lynde — I didn't want to; but since you have begun it, I'll tell you frankly, something did draw me to that woman the very first moment I saw her; but I wouldn't go."

"Precisely, Phebe."

"O, now, sir, you consider it all temper, but it isn't;

it's self-respect. I don't wonder you thought I was dreadful when I talked so in Boston."

"I thought you were very much to be pitied," said Mr. Lynde, kindly. "The marriage seemed to me, as to yourself, a very hasty affair, for I did not know at that time of the early attachment."

Helen smiled sarcastically.

"Early, do you call it? I should think it was late enough in life, for that matter, Mr. Lynde."

"Begging your pardon, Miss Phebe, fifteen *is* early, decidedly so."

"Fifteen? Why, what in the world are you talking about, sir?"

Mr. Lynde looked at the upturned, wondering face, and hesitated.

"I am not telling you anything new: you must have heard of this before."

"Did you say an early attachment, sir? No, I never heard of that; it can't be true. Why, Mr. Lynde, last winter was the first time they ever met — didn't you know it? What do you mean by looking so? Do pray tell me, quick."

"O, how picturesque! how delightsome!" chirped an ecstatic voice through the trees, followed by an eye-glass and a roly-poly little woman behind it. "Mayn't I come, too, and admire the view? See, Mr. Lynde, what I've brought you," said Miss Liscom, opening a motherly basket, and disclosing boned turkey, pickles, and charlotte russe, all in excellent order, and tempting to behold. "Don't you run away next time without eating a good breakfast, or I shall be sure to fol-

low you, you naughty man, for I won't have you starved while you live at my house."

"O, for a little wholesome neglect!" thought Mr. Lynde.

And Helen shrank back like a flower that has an "antipathy." How could she endure this intrusion? And how could she wait to hear the rest of the story?

CHAPTER X.

"GIRLS' PLANS."

QUINNEBASSET, Sept. 5.

DEAR DI: She came, she saw, she conquered — me! That story Mr. Lynde told about her gave me such a prick in the conscience, not to say a stab, that I couldn't rest till I had gone and begged her pardon.

O, the grandeur of that woman, Di! You ought to have heard her talk to me! If there had been the thinnest film of ice left in my feelings — which there wasn't — it would have melted in a moment.

Pardon? Why, she wouldn't own there was any occasion! Did you ever hear of such magnanimity? She thanked me for my "high-principled conduct" in helping her gain the love of the children; as if a heathen could have done any less than I! Then she seemed to know, with her marvellous insight, how the little morbid spot in my heart was aching at the thought of mamma's not being the first; for she said she should give Morris a fine scolding for telling me that story.

"Don't let one unhappy feeling disturb your mind, my child. Papa loved your mother very dearly, and if I chose, I might be jealous of her memory every day I live."

Somehow that comforted me, just as she knew it would, I suppose, for I never could bear the idea of her queening it over my poor dead mamma.

Then she said she had no thought of taking *her* place with any of us children.

"An own mother is God's best gift, and can never be repeated. I am simply your most devoted friend; but if you will grant me the sweet title of mother, it will gratify me, my dear, and I am sure it cannot offend the blessed one in heaven."

Do you suppose I could resist that? Do you think I have no appreciation of saints, martyrs, and angels?

"Why, mother," said I, throwing my arms around her neck, "I've been in love with you from the beginning, and now I'll own it."

"I've been in love with you, too," said she; and then we laughed and cried, and had, what your brother Frank would call, a "spoony time." But she made me promise on the spot not to put on any more airs, and not to compare her, even in my thoughts, with my own mother. She is not like her, she says, and isn't going to try to imitate her. She shan't sugar the waffles, or put onions in the stuffed fowls, because she has a right to her own way of doing things. She *will* have her liberty, and be an individual, and I needn't attempt to put her down! She said it with that sweet, bewitching smile, showing her white teeth, but meant every word; and I exclaimed,—

"Three cheers for Mrs. Asbury! Independence now and forever!" and hugged her all the closer.

Father looks as gay as a lark. I didn't know before how my behavior had troubled him, but I see it all

now. He never meets me alone but he pats me on the head, and says, "My dear daughter," or, "My good Helen," which makes me feel like a dreadful sinner. And yesterday Thurzy called me "an angel-creetur," with such emphasis that I am sure she understands it all. The children never knew there was any coolness, so of course they are not aware that mother and I have had a making-up. But cousin Morris can see, — bless you, such eyes! His visit has been a blessing all around, for I am really learning to draw, and you know my aspirations in that quarter. Sharly didn't like to have me touch a pencil; but he has won her over, and now she insists upon my improving every minute. It is very funny, and I do wonder how he brought it about. I wonder still more what is on his mind as he lies under the trees thinking. If it is what I fancy, I wish that cruel parent could see his pale face now, for I'm sure he would relent, and hasten the wedding.

Adieu, dear. HELEN.

P. S. — Papa sends love to you, and regards to your father.

"Cousin Morris," said Helen, one day, as she was sketching a view from Sunset Hill, with Sharly curled at her feet sound asleep, "can I ever learn to draw and paint well? Please tell me, for you are honest, and I can believe what you say."

"Ah, Helen, you call me cousin Morris, and pay me a compliment in the same breath. Aren't you afraid I may be bribed into flattering you a little?"

"No; for if you do flatter me, I'll take back the compliment, and never call you cousin Morris again."

"Then I'll be as truthful as the sun. But why do you care much whether you have talent or not? If you learn to be a good judge of pictures, isn't that all you want?"

"No, sir; I am very ambitious."

"Sorry to hear it."

"I mean, I want to know how to paint pictures myself, well enough to — perhaps to teach."

Mr. Lynde rose, and clapped his hands softly.

"Did this in Cæsar seem ambitious? Why, Helen, you take away my breath with your audacity!"

"Now, you needn't laugh at me. I mean, an accomplished teacher, Mr. Lynde."

"Ah, an accomplished teacher, Phebe! There are those who advertise to draw a crayon head in fifteen minutes, and a spread eagle in three. You don't aspire to anything like that?"

"I never heard of dauby people of that sort, sir. We never had them in this part of the country. You understand what I mean — I want to learn the art thoroughly, and paint beautiful pictures, that good judges will want to buy."

"Well, Helen, so you can, if you persevere. You are capable of a high degree of excellence in this direction."

"Really and truly? O, cousin Morris, I'm so glad! I want to be good for something."

"But what do you mean by teaching, Helen — you that were born with a gold spoon in your mouth?"

"Gold spoons get lost, sometimes."

"O, yes, I see. Moreover, women have a mission."

"No, they haven't!" said Helen, flushing hotly. "I

"O, how picturesque! how delightsome!" — Page 93.

wish people would stop twitting about that! Men have a mission just as much as women, but you never hear of their saying anything about it! I simply mean this: if papa should ever fail in business, I want to be able to take care of the family."

Mr. Lynde looked at the earnest, brilliant face, and dropped his tone of raillery at once.

"Do girls of your age generally have so much forethought?"

"I presume so, if they are eldest daughters; at any rate, Di Cary and I have always had plans in our heads; but it is foolish to speak of them, and I never did before. But I didn't expect you would laugh, cousin Morris; I thought you would understand."

"Why, dear cousin, believe me, I am not laughing; I am only smiling my earnest approval. I wish there were more such girls as you and Di Cary. I have the highest admiration for Di."

"I'm delighted to hear it; though of course you have. She is full of fun; but they can't make a fashionable woman of her, can they? Did you ever see such an independent little creature?"

"Has she a talent for any special thing?"

"No, sir — there's the trouble; she wishes she had; but as she hasn't, she means to fit herself for a teacher."

"And her father worth a million at least! Noble girl! And here is her friend Helen, who intends to become an artist. Have you considered that it will cost hard work?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, my child, you haven't learned the mere grammar of the art as yet."

"To be sure I haven't. Before you came, I thought I knew something, but now I'm finding out I don't know anything."

"Well, doesn't that discourage you?"

"No, sir; I'm going back to boarding-school in the fall, and I'll have a better teacher than I had before, if I can, and devote my spare time to drawing and painting."

"A year won't perfect you."

"I know it."

"Two years won't do it."

"No."

"Neither will three."

"I should hope not. Do people ever become perfect?"

"Let me shake hands with you," said Mr. Lynde, rising; "you hold the key to success, my dear, the little iron key of perseverance. If I can ever help you, I'll do it."

"O, you have helped me, sir; you do help me a great deal," said Helen, her whole face kindling with youthful enthusiasm.

Mr. Lynde smiled thoughtfully, almost sadly, as he regarded her.

"You will never speak of this before anybody, please, not even before mother, for she would tell father, and he thinks girls' plans never amount to anything."

"And how do you know I have any better opinion of girls' plans than he has?"

"Because you listen more respectfully, sir."

"Thank you. I'm glad you think me respectful."

"And I can talk to you very easily, cousin Morris. You seem to be making sport, but you never are. I always could talk to you, though I can't quite tell why."

"I can tell why," said Mr. Lynde; and the sad look deepened on his bright face for a moment. "It is always easy to talk to sick people, Helen. You feel instinctively that we are going" — here he made an upward spiral motion with his finger, describing the flight of a bird — "going higher; that our earthly hopes are crushed, and there is nothing to hinder us from listening to the schemes and plans of other people."

"O, please don't, cousin Morris! I never heard you talk so before. You always say you shall get well."

"Yes, if the Lord pleases," said he, looking up to the hills with a reverent gaze. "But, Helen, between you and me, I don't much expect it. See," said he, pushing back a spotless wristband from his arm, "the grosser part of me is fast melting away; how long do you think it will be before I am ready for an upward flight?"

"O, don't speak of it, sir; don't speak of dying and leaving this beautiful world."

"Ah, but it is beautiful," murmured the young man, stooping to inhale the fragrance of a clump of ferns, then with a sudden impulse encircling them with both arms, as if he would take them to his heart like friends. "A beautiful world! And we who have never seen a better, would fain stay here forever!"

"How true that was, how very true," thought Helen, with overflowing eyes.

"I did not mean to pain you, my dear cousin; but when you talked to me just now of my art, the words

went closer than you knew, and I had such a sense of the richness and sweetness of life, that my heart rebelled for a moment. For you must know, Helen, that I, too, have a cherished purpose, the growth of years instead of months, and it is only lately that I am learning to give it up."

"How thoughtless I was, sir — I, who am so well and strong! Do, pray, forgive me."

"For what? For your health and strength?" said Mr. Lynde, springing to his feet buoyantly, and swinging his alpenstock as if he would charm away his dark mood. "Never mind it, Helen, I shan't leave the world till I have fulfilled my mission in it. I believe in a mission, if you don't, and I believe 'man is immortal till his work is done.'"

Helen looked up at the illuminated face, and almost felt as if an angel were speaking to her. She forgot her own plans and purposes, which had just now seemed all-important, and her whole heart was in her eyes as she said, —

"Won't the voyage to Europe help you? O, cousin Morris, can't something be done?"

"Bless my little cousin Helen! Does she care? Would she like to keep me in this happy world?"

"O, yes, I care very much."

"That is comforting, that is refreshing! Thank you, Helen. If you were going to die, what would you regret most?"

"Leaving my friends."

"Fortunate child! Think what it would be to have none to leave! Do you know that my aunt Katharine is the nearest relative I have in the world?"

"Yes; and I'm so sorry for you -- without father or mother, or brother or sister."

"Helen, I wish you were my sister. I wish I could take all Jubilee Hill with me to Europe!"

"Cousin Morris! cousin Morris!" cried the twins, rushing up, each with her apron full of sticks, like a miniature Goody Blake, "we've brought you lots of twigs to *analyze;* and if you can tell what trees they belong to —"

"Why, children, where have you been?" said Sharly, assuming an upright position, and looking round in dismay. "I didn't go to sleep, did I, Helen? What have you been talking about?"

"Look here, let us get through speaking. We peeped through the bushes, and saw somebody fastening their boat down there by the bank, and we came to tell you. It's Pity Jones and Peeky Liscom. Isn't it an everlasting shame!"

"Delia Liscom," said Helen, rising suddenly. "Well, you know that little den back there behind the alders? You will find me sitting there when you are ready to go home."

"And me," said Mr. Lynde.

"And me," echoed Sharly.

"And us, too," cried the twins.

CHAPTER XI.

SUNSET HILL.

DID they think Delia Liscom was the woman to be baffled by a clump of trees, overhanging a natural cave?

"I thought you'd be here," said she, walking straight to the spot, followed by the gallant Mr. Jones. He was a young man of elegant leisure, owned a handsome boat, and was fond of rowing with his lady friends, provided they would take the laboring oar. Miss Liscom was no favorite of his; but when she asked for his company to Sunset Hill, just to see Helen for a moment, of course he could not refuse.

"Haven't you the least curiosity to know what my errand is?" said Delia, archly. "I came to ask you to a little party at our house to-morrow evening, Helen — you, and Mr. Lynde, and Sharly."

"I thank you," said Helen.

"And you'll be sure to come?"

"O, yes; thank you; you're very kind," spoke up Sharly, to whom grown-up parties were an unknown delight.

Mr. Jones looked as if he supposed the interview was now at an end; but Delia had no idea of going yet.

"Ah," said she, gazing around in an ecstasy, and then seating herself beside Mr. Lynde, on a knoll, "what is so satisfactory as Nature? Do you know I fairly envy you these good times, Mr. Lynde?"

As she spoke, she looked up at him through the black lace veil, which she considered very becoming to her complexion, not knowing that he disliked spotted lace, and had said "it made a woman's face look as if it were covered with flies."

"O, Mr. Lynde, I could sit and gaze at these trees forever!"

Mr. Jones felt very sorry to hear it.

"Do tell me, Mr. Lynde, which is your favorite tree, that I may know if our tastes agree."

"I can tell you," cried Vic, as Mr. Lynde did not answer at once; "it's the elm!"

"O, I'm so glad, so very glad!" said Miss Liscom, with childish simplicity, "for it's my darling tree!"

"So it is everybody's," said Vic; "and the fairies like it, too. There's a story about it, that they took an elm — the fairies did — and dwindled it down, and crowned it with gold; and what do you suppose was the name of it then? It was just a common flower, and you've seen it a hundred times."

"You dear little creature! I couldn't guess. Does it look like an elm tree?"

"Yes, just the shape of it; only so small!"

"A flower? Do tell us what it is, Mr. Lynde."

"No; let me guess," said Mr. Jones; "it's the golden-rod."

"Is it, Mr. Lynde?" said Delia, looking up appealingly. "I won't believe it unless you say so. Is it the golden-rod?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Lynde, springing up suddenly, with a motion as of brushing off August flies.

Delia was very wearisome to him with her eternal small questions. If he had only known how her withered heart was expanding in his presence, like a faded flower set in water, he would have wondered and pitied, and perhaps might have had a little more patience.

"Now, really, that is a beautiful idea. The golden-rod *is* shaped like the elm, if you only think of it, isn't it, Mr. Lynde? There, let's sit round in a social group — O, how cosy this is! — and talk about Nature. Pitkin, which is *your* favorite tree?"

Mr. Jones was becoming hungry, but his politeness did not forsake him.

"Don't ask me, Delia. 'Comparisons are odious.' It would be like deciding which is the most beautiful woman of my acquaintance, and you know that to me all women are beautiful," said Pitkin, sweeping his gloved hand over his head, as if paying homage to the sex, though managing at the same time to brush forward a few scanty hairs to help cover the bald spot on his crown.

"Well, Helen, you then. I suppose you have no objection to saying which is your favorite tree?"

"Not in the least. I prefer the Lombardy poplar."

"Why, Helen Asbury!" cried Sharly, "what horrid taste! I never heard of anybody that liked that stiff thing!"

"Nor I; and I believe the Lombardy has sense enough to know it," replied Helen, with a comical twist of the lips; "and that's why it holds itself

aloof, and doesn't entangle its branches with other trees. I like it because it is so dignified and delicate, and never tries to meddle."

Helen was looking straight at the ground as she spoke, but the undertone of mischief in her voice set Mr. Lynde to laughing inwardly.

"Now that's such a poetical idea!" said the unconscious Delia. "People that mind their own business! Yes, yes; I see the force of the comparison, don't you, Mr. Lynde?"

"Well, perhaps so, Miss Liscom; but it is the first time I ever heard of admiring a tree on purely moral grounds; and I'm afraid Helen is too charitable towards the poplar. I've heard of another and very different reason why it holds itself aloof, as she phrases it."

"There, now, he's going to tell a story," said Helen; "come sit here by me, Vic, and keep still."

"Well, once there was a king," began Mr. Lynde, raising his yellow eyebrows seriously, "and some one stole his golden drinking-cup. He sent men far and wide to search for it, and the thief trembled lest his guilt should be discovered. He did not know where to hide the cup; he could not put it in the ground, for that would leave a scar. At last he thought of a tree, and went in the dark night to a poplar, saying, 'Here is booty I have stolen. Guard it well till I come again.' It so happened, next morning, that the king sent his servants to search all the forests, and they went to the trees, one after another, asking, 'Have you seen the cup?' 'Not I,' said the oak. 'Nor I,' said the elm. 'Nor I,' whistled the pine tree. 'You can't mean me,' said the willow, bowing with shame. 'I

would rather die than steal,' said the silver poplar, trembling. 'So would I,' said the maple, blushing. But the poplar held up her hands to heaven, and took oath that she had never seen the cup. Then the men gave up the search; the cup was never found; but from that day to this the guilty tree has been doomed to hold up her arms, till now they have grown stiff, and she will never be able to swing them by her side while the world stands."

"How delightsome! how charming!" cried Miss Delia. "Why, Mr. Lynde, you acted it out like a play. Do tell me, girls, does he often entertain you in this way? If he does, I shall have to come with you and hear him."

"O, no, he doesn't, he doesn't," exclaimed the duet, eagerly; "we'll leave it to Helen if he does."

And to make thorough work of it, and nip all dreadful possibilities in the bud, Vic added, with her usual directness, —

"You wouldn't hear enough to pay you for coming, Miss Liscom."

A very good-natured look, not to say a smile, passed over everybody's face at this.

"Miss Vic," said Mr. Jones, suddenly convinced that she was a very interesting child, "you may keep that jackknife I just lent you."

"Really, Pitkin," said Delia, with a bland smile, "now we have got here, and are having such a social time just among ourselves, suppose we stop and see the sun set."

"Certainly; as you please, Delia," replied the victimized Pitkin. "Are the sunsets very fine up here this summer, Miss Vic?"

"No, sir; the last one wasn't worth a cent," replied Vic, demurely.

"Last time we saw the sun set up here, it was covered with blueberries," added Van.

"What, the sun?"

"No, sir! O, no — the hill, of course."

"Perhaps Mr. Jones thought we had made an important discovery, and learned the cause of the spots on the sun," laughed Mr. Lynde; and Delia laughed also.

An hour or less of this uninteresting talk, and then the sun set behind the blue mountains. It was a glorious scene, and the splendors of the sky and river were one and the same, for the water mirrored every passing tint, like glass. If one could only have enjoyed it in silence; but here was Delia! Mr. Lynde walked off, to stand a little apart, while he watched the colors of purple, crimson, and gold, as they deepened, varied, faded, and finally blended into a roseate amber. He was gazing reverently, with uncovered head, when there was a light touch on his arm.

"You cannot look at it in the presence of a throng, any more than I can, Mr. Lynde. There is such a sacredness in Nature, such a — a — kind of holiness"

Mr. Lynde felt like a person who prays in secret, and is suddenly startled by a listener at the keyhole. He replaced his hat and stepped backward.

"It is seldom I see any one who feels about Nature as I do," sighed Miss Liscom, really moved, and struggling in vain to express herself. It never occurred to her that silence was better than any speech. "O, Mr. Lynde, how it stirs one's very soul!"

"The dew is falling, Miss Liscom."

"So it is. We really must go home, or you will take cold," cried Delia, with an affectionate earnestness which made Mr. Lynde ashamed of himself. How could he get out of patience with this good, motherly soul, who was so faithful about steeping sage tea for him, and looking up remedies for his cough? But, as they walked down the hill together, behind the others, Delia's soul was stirred again.

"O, Mr. Lynde, what a pensiveness there is about moonlight! How it calls up the better emotions!"

"Not always," replied the ungrateful young man, forgetting the sage tea; "sometimes it makes me nervous."

Miss Liscom looked up in surprise, as Mr. Lynde swung his alpenstock in rapid circles.

"O, I know what you mean — you mean a peculiar sadness, Mr. Lynde — a sort of melancholy regret. I feel it, too."

"Yes, a mixture of nervousness *and* regret," said Mr. Lynde, mischievously.

"There, that's just it — that expresses it. Ah, the moon, the moon! how it does call up your dead friends, doesn't it, Mr. Lynde?"

"No, Miss Liscom, I am happy to say it does not. My dead friends are peacefully sleeping in their graves, and I would not have them called up on any account."

What did the man mean? He couldn't be making game of her? But Miss Liscom was not to be silenced in this way.

"O, you facetious creature! you almost shocked me when you said that, just for a moment. But I understand you so well, Mr. Lynde — you shrink from speak-

ing your inmost feelings. O, I understand it, perfectly."

Her perfect understanding seemed to render any reply needless, and Mr. Lynde merely remarked, —

"Suppose we wait here till the others come up?"

And thus ended the first moonlight *tête-à-tête* these two had ever enjoyed together.

"I thought he was full of poetry," mused the crestfallen Delia; "but he isn't — he likes it a great deal better when I speak about plasters for his chest, or ask him how he'll have things cooked. I'll never talk hifalutin to him again, — never, no, never!"

It was late before the party reached home; and when Mrs. Page went to Mrs. Asbury's at eight o'clock, to borrow the last Independent, the carryall was just crossing the bridge.

"What's the matter, Sister Bumpus?" said Mrs. Page; "you look unhappy."

"I was only thinking what a fool I be," replied Theresa, gashing the dough with a chopping-knife. "Delia Liscom has been acting real curious, and I'm glad she's done it, and shown herself out — I like to know who to tie to."

"Why, what has Sister Liscom done now?" said Mrs. Page, in a tone which indicated that Delia was not regarded as an ornament to the church.

"Well, you know what a great fuss she makes over dear Sister Bumpus, and now she's gone and made a party, and invited every one but me!"

"It may be a mistake," said Mrs. Page, trying to look astonished, for she was a woman of strong sympathies when she could forget her own troubles.

"No, it ain't. She came here this afternoon and gave out her invitations right to my face. 'Tell Helen and Sharly to be sure to come,' said she, 'for I shall have all the young folks in town.' Now, what do you think of that, Sister Page?"

"It seemed uncivil."

"I should think it did! Uncivil is no name for it. I call it the heighth of sarse. Ain't I as upright and truthful a woman as you'll find in this town, making allowance for our all being totally depraved? And ain't I a good ten years younger than Delia Liscom? Now, what's the reason I ain't fit company for the folks she's going to invite?"

"O, well, I wouldn't mind it, Thurzy," said Mrs. Page, looking at the honest, hard-featured, coarse-mannered young woman with pity. If Miss Bumpus did not see her own unfitness for drawing-room circles, then it were of little use, and hardly a kindness, to tell her of it. "Never care for what Delia Liscom says and does. She is very aspiring, and, I dare say, wants to have the aristocracy, and nobody else."

"Well, she might have run the risk of asking me, for I shouldn't have gone," said Theresa, harrowing the flour-board with a knife. "But she's so took up with Mr. Lynde, that I ought to overlook it. 'Hain't he got interesting eyes, Thurzy?' says she. I was a good mind to tell her they were bright enough to see through her — poor, weak sister! 'Ain't you afraid Helen will fall in love with him?' says she. Now, the idea! 'Why, look here,' says I, 'he's a sick man, with one foot in the grave, and Helen would as soon think of falling in love with a cherubim as him. Besides,

her thoughts ain't running on matrimony the whole continual time,' says I, 'and I wish other folks's wasn't,' for I felt it my duty to speak plain to her, though I don't expect 'twill do a mite of good. Hark! here they come. You can always hear them laughing before the carryall turns into the gate. Don't lisp a word I've said, Sister Page!"

"No; and don't you go taking it to heart, Thurzy."

"Bless you; you needn't think it troubles me any! My mind is set on higher things, I should hope. Why, Sister Page, half the time I feel as if I didn't care enough about this world to keep myself together."

CHAPTER XII.

DELIA'S PARTY.

"WELL, Sister Bumpus, how do we look?" said the two sisters, entering the kitchen, dressed for the party.

"O, my! don't you shine! Sharly, you just put some johnny-jump-ups and a sprig of cedar in your hair, over the left ear, and you'll look complete. But, goodness sakes alive! you can't come up to Helen! Why, she looks like an angel-picture."

"An 'evening beauty' Helen is," said Sharly, playing both sets of dimples, the merry and tearful, for she was the conscious possessor of all the good looks of the family, and it seemed hardly fair to have her rights usurped.

"Yes, I know it. Folks ask me whether I think Helen Asbury is handsome or homely, and for the life of me I can't tell. Which be you, Helen?"

"Both. I look pretty to-night, but it's make-believe, for I wasn't pretty till I put on this hair-line silk and the rose-colored ribbons."

"Nobody would mistrust you are tanned," said Sharly; "you look as white as I do."

"Yes; but in the daytime your complexion is pearl, and mine smoke-pearl, especially when I'm out of doors

so much. I'd like to have some up-and-down, honest beauty like yours, Sharly, that wouldn't come and go; then it seems to me I should respect myself more. I hate shams."

"You old darling!" said Sharly, kissing and patting Helen, as if to assure her she was freely forgiven for looking better than she ought.

"Well, good by, Thurzy; wish you were going with us."

"Me, Helen? I'd rather pull turnips all day in the field," responded Miss Bumpus, elevating her sled-runner nose; and she spoke the truth. She disdained parties, and all she had ever wanted was the privilege of saying "No."

Miss Liscom had taken this occasion to slight her particular friends, and invite to her house only those who would consider it a condescension to go. Miss "Liddy Ann Crane," the village dressmaker, was a woman after her own heart, and many a spicy dish of gossip had they shared together; but what would Mr. Lynde say to meeting a spinster who wore a linen switch, talked bad grammar, and went out sewing by the day?

Then there was Mrs. Porter Smythe, the milliner. A sudden doubt had seized Delia, whether divorced people like her were legally entitled to a place in the best society. No; she could ask Miss Crane, Mrs. Porter Smythe, and Miss Bumpus to tea some time, and make it all right.

Then, as for the young men, there were more than the usual number in town, so she could well afford to leave out the mechanics, and those who were employed

in the potato factory. One must draw the line somewhere; though, as she remarked to Mr. Lynde, "It is really necessary to put up with a great deal of uncongenial society in a country village."

She did not hesitate to invite all the strangers ruralizing at the two or three hotels, though very little was known of them, except that they spent money freely.

Dr. Willard and his bright young wife were there; Judith Willard, the gifted authoress, and her stylish sisters, Tid and Mate; Eleanor Jones, whose dark hair had suddenly grown yellow during a visit to Philadelphia last winter; Pitkin, her brother; and the thrice elegant Mrs. Oscaforia Satterlee, of Boston, their sister; Helen and Sharly, &c.

Helen was really the most brilliant-looking young lady in the room, and Delia said to herself, with a sigh, "The time was when I used to look like that. Pity one has to lose it all, and grow fleshy and wrinkled."

"How stiff it is; O dear!" said Mrs. Willard, aside, to her sister-in-law Judith, as they watched the moon through the window going into an eclipse.

"I've attended funerals that weren't half so solemn," remarked Mr. Lynde to Helen, who replied, —

"We don't know each other; half these people are strangers, and that's the trouble."

Delia bustled about with an uncomfortably red face. How to mingle these foreign elements which she had brought together, was more than she knew.

"O, Mr. Lynde," said she, tapping him on the shoulder in her peculiarly girlish way, "do help me; do set something going; there's a dear, good man!"

"Take them out to look at the moon," said Mr.

Lynde; "I am sure you couldn't ask for better entertainment than an eclipse."

"O, I never thought of that; how kind you are!" said Delia, as if the astronomical appearance had been of his own devising for her especial benefit.

There was a little buzz, a rustle, and a movement towards the front door.

"I'll say something shocking, which will break the spell," thought Mr. Lynde, really pitying poor Delia's distress.

"Mrs. Satterlee," said he, taking that lady's arm, and leading her down the gravel walk, "allow me to present you to Cynthia in an eclipse," pointing with inimitable grace to the black, silver-edged moon; "and now, Cynthia, allow me to present *you* to Mrs. Satterlee, who never *was* eclipsed!"

The effect was magical. A smile went from face to face like an electric thrill; and when Mrs. Satterlee made a charming courtesy, and addressed dark Cynthia in drawing-room parlance, as a "lady she had admired from childhood," Dr. Willard, who was "easy to laugh," laughed aloud.

There was no more formality after that. The very proper lady from Portland said, —

"Let us join hands and form a line, and everybody make a bow;" which was improved upon by the lady from Bangor, who suggested that each should recite in turn a verse to the moon. Mr. Lynde came first, and quoted so readily, —

"The white moon shrinks her sickle clear,"

that Delia, who of course stood next, was lost in

admiration, and could think of nothing but

"Roll on, silver moon," —

such a countrified line, that she chose to pay a forfeit rather than repeat it.

"I must get a book of extracts and read up," thought she, chagrined, as the musical bits of poetry rang out like bells on the evening air. But when it came to composing couplets, Delia found it required more than mere "reading up" to shine in intellectual society. The first subject given was "Original Sin," and Mr. Lynde, Mr. Hackett, Judith, and Helen wrote instantly, —

"What an ingrain thing is original sin!
It begins before we have stolen a pin;
It really came into the world by Adam,
Though he tried to palm it off on Madam."

There were several other specimens of a like nature, thrown off just as carelessly, for the guests proved to be very bright and ready-witted. They had impromptu charades from the words Nitrogen and Parasol, in which Mr. Lynde and Mr. Hackett were decidedly the stars, though Delia was obliged to warn Mr. Lynde continually against fatiguing himself.

When it came to "What is my thought like?" and Sharly answered, "Like rain," Mr. Hackett said, "My thought was a dress. Why is a dress like rain?" "O, because it *descends*," replied Sharly, quickly, looking from her tall sister to her own little self, with a pretty, twinkling glance which made everybody smile. Sharly's eyes did have a bright way of twinkling; but Helen's, which were larger, darker, and softer, had no such way — they simply shone.

Delia, who could not think of a single witty thing to say, felt herself quite cast in the shade. With Liddy Ann Crane, now, and Mrs. Porter Smythe, one might venture to put on airs! But Delia's crowning mortification was Miss O'Neil. Just as they were making "Characteristic Initials," — such as "Household Angel" for Helen Asbury, "Merry, Exquisite Limner" for Morris E. Lynde, — and had given out "Neuralgic Old Nondescript" for Norah O'Neil, the inopportune creature walked in, and maliciously demanded of Delia a "junk of pork." It was one of the Liscom trials that Miss O'Neil kept her pork in their barrel of brine, identified by a red string; and whenever she felt out of humor, and Delia had company, she took it into her head that she must bake some beans the next day, and Delia must go down cellar for the pork, to save her own rheumatic limbs.

However, this vexation could not annul the fact that Miss Liscom's party had been a success.

"And it is all owing to you, you dear, good man," said she, tripping back to the parlor, after the last guest had departed, and beaming smiles upon Mr. Lynde.

"Did I really help you, Miss Liscom? Then I am glad, for you have been so kind to me that I shall always consider myself your debtor."

And then he bade her a pleasant "good night." She was much older than himself, and had always reminded him of a hospital nurse. He was really grateful to her; but how could he possibly know she was disappointed because he did not linger a while and talk? She went to bed thinking bitterly that she had offended

some of her best friends for his sake, but the sacrifice had not been appreciated.

Delia's party was the beginning of a round of social entertainments, to which Delia was always invited; but she found them very dull, for Mr Lynde seldom attended, preferring quiet evenings with his aunt and cousins.

The bivouacking continued whenever the weather was mi'd enough; but on cold or stormy days the family all resorted to the large sewing-room up stairs; and Helen, with her sketch-book and pencils, bestowed herself in one corner, behind a dividing fence of chairs. This was her drawing-room, she said, and no one must enter it but her drawing teacher. It seemed to her that she was just beginning to learn, and now cousin Morris was talking of going away! He had already overstaid his time, he said. The Cunard steamer, in which he had engaged passage for Europe, was to sail on the twenty-first of October, and as he had a little business in New-York, he must leave Quinnebasset on the seventeenth.

The hour of parting could not fail to be a sad one for Mrs. Asbury and the children. The duet had concerted in private to make a black flag, on which was stitched in ghostly white the word "Desolation;" and this trifling outward display of deep inward grief they hoisted at full mast over the parlor mantel, on the dreadful morning of departure.

"Because we wanted to let you know how we fe-eel!" said Vic, wiping her unpoetically red nose. "The other side has got 'Good by, Mr. ——,' you see; and the long mark stands for *Line!*"

"Yes, we had to," said Van, "for the cambric wasn't quite big enough."

Neither was the child's handkerchief big enough. Her tears overflowed the borders thereof, and even drenched the bib of her apron.

"You dear little cousins! that 'Good by, Mr. *Line*,' carries me back to my childhood, when a naughty boy used to stand beside me in the reading-class, and whisper, 'Stop; you *missed* a line.' I always did stop, very much confused, beginning the sentence and reading it over again, till I found out one day that he only meant '*You're Mr. Lynde*,' and after that he couldn't cheat me again."

How much cousin Morris was touched by the childish devotion of the twins, and the less boisterous grief of his aunt and the older girls, it was not possible to know, for he pretended to be in high spirits, and spoke as lightly of this uncertain journey in search of the ever-receding phantom of health, as if it had been a day's sail on Medumscott Pond, in pursuit of pickerel or water-lilies.

He kissed everybody, not omitting Sister Bumpus, who appeared at the hall door with red eyes, and black eyebrows scowling defiantly above them.

"We shall meet on the other side of Jordan," said she, much gratified by this proof that he regarded her as one of the family.

"On this side first, I hope, Miss Theresa, unless you run away with a preacher before I come back," returned Mr. Lynde, with a smile which she afterwards said was "enough to take a tear out of a rock."

Mr. Lynde's final adieux to Delia Liscom were waved

from the top of the stage-coach, sundry symptoms of breaking down in her manner having warned him to spare her feelings as much as possible.

"The good soul seems more distressed at parting with me than even aunt Katharine; yet here I run away from her like a brute. Well, I hope the writing-desk I have left Helen to give her may make some amends."

Then, as the clumsy stage clattered through the village, he looked back at the peaceful scenery, saying to himself, —

"Farewell, quaint, beautiful Quinnebasset! gliding away forever, and taking with you Jubilee Hill and the beloved faces! I could shame my manhood and weep like a tired child."

CHAPTER XIII.

GOSSIP.

QUINNEBASSET, June 1.

DEAR DI: Your last letter fairly bristled with interrogation points. Yes, we will be sure, when we write "Mr. ——," to ask him to call on you the moment he returns; but he won't come till September.

("Mr. ——" was a short-hand way of writing "Mr. Lynde," ever since the twins sported the flag called "Desolation.")

He has now been gone more than a year and a half; can it be possible? Mamma hardly believes his health is entirely regained; she says he must be indulging in a "frolic of the imagination." I want to see him very much; but am afraid if he comes back well, he won't seem quite the same, for there was a peculiar purity and delicacy about him, such as I never saw in any man before, except uncle Charles. I often think of those days when we all went gypsying with him, and I know some of the words he dropped so lightly and carelessly have helped me more than I can tell. He is not one of the "instructive" kind, but, as Judith Willard says, "he exalts everybody who approaches him; and so does Mrs. Asbury."

I am sitting in the library, which was once the china

closet, and can get a view of the garden and Italian bees through the long window; (we've had those bees three years, and not a drop of honey have we sipped!) while through the arched doorway I can look into the back parlor and see my ivy, which reaches entirely around the room; the cosy, half-worn furniture, and the lovely little clock on the mantel, which you admired so much, but which never did and never will keep good time. It tells white lies with its little silver tongue; but "look in its face, and one forgives them all."

I can hear mamma in the nursery talking to the baby in a voice as sweet as rippling waters. He is a year old to-day, and not a tooth in his blessed little head. You wouldn't know him, for he doesn't look at all as he did last summer. His eyes are like turquoises set in gold — the deepest blue with a shining fringe; in short, like Mr. ——'s. He is little Nameless yet, for papa still insists on Adoniram for grandpa Dillingham, and it isn't our duty to consent to that.

Now for your questions in their order, not counting the one about Morris.

No. 1. "Does Sister Bumpus tell of her religious experiences as freely as ever?"

Yes. During the revival last spring she kept declaring she was "sick and tired o' sin," and helped Mrs. Nason shake our carpets with a kind of religious fury. When she is "sick and tired of sin," it is always in the most vehement way, and she works tremendously. She has made herself a new gown, though she insists upon it that she "doesn't care enough about this world to keep herself together." Strange how deluded the very best people can be as to their "inner women."

No. 2. "Are the twins the same jolly little souls?"

Yes. Vic appeared at dinner-table to-day with one boot blacked, having forgotten the other; and Sharly said, "Mamma, why don't those children have some French kids?" Sharly doesn't realize that we are beginning to retrench.

No. 3. "Papa wishes to know if your father is in good spirits about his business?"

No. He has met with heavy losses. I suppose your father knows what they are. I heard him tell mother, the other day, he had saved several thousands, and put it all in government bonds, and shouldn't speculate any more. He and mother have both been quite ill, but are better, though mother is not yet able to leave her room. (This, probably, has nothing to do with the government bonds!)

No. 4. "Is your aunt Marian as full of baby knowledge as ever?"

You forget that she and uncle Charles and Margaret all went to Europe last March.

No. 5. "Is Mrs. Page still living?"

Yes; at a poor, dying rate. Regards our baby "in a bony light," and prescribes for him; but we don't mind.

No. 6. "Is her husband as bright as ever?"

Yes, more so; "seems if." A colporteur asked him the other day if he enjoyed religion. "No," said he; "but Dorkis does." I really believe he expects to reach heaven through her merits. Whenever he goes to Poonoosac to take things to market, mamma invites "Dorkis" here visiting, and we all do our best to enliven the poor soul. She can talk politics like a states-

man, and religion like a divine — and so can mother; and they really have good times together. It never occurred to us, in days of old, that we owed any duty to sick-minded Mrs. Page; but the apostolic Mrs. Asbury is always hunting up duties — bless her!

No. 7. "I want the Quinnebasset news — how are the Jones's?"

All well. They have remodelled their house, which is now rather handsomer than ours. You know they live twenty rods above us, on table-land, and they are making it look like an Eden. Marietta lives still farther beyond, in a brick house, with a red barn before it. You know she married Captain Coyle, and he would set the barn where he chose. Poor Marietta Jones! Pitkin is still gallant, and "Elly-nory" still has golden locks; a nice girl, though.

No. 8. "And Miss O'Neil?"

The last I heard of her she was buying potatoes at Mr. Willard's store, and said she preferred small ones, as they were to be made into hash!

No. 9. "And Miss Liscom?"

A good deal about her. Thurzy came in the other day, saying, "Look here, girls, Mr. Liscom is going to be married again; he has been looking up another lot in the graveyard!" It was a grim joke, for he has had four wives; but, strange to say, he was married the next week to the thrice-widowed Thankful Works, of Poonoosac. It was hard for Delia to give up the housekeeping key, but she did it pleasantly, and mother says, deserves much credit. She has had a wretched line of step-mothers coming and going ever since she was a baby, and dear, charitable mamma says it is "nat-

ural she should be anxious to have a home of her own, and hardly strange that she acts a little silly about it." I may mention that she has a watch-charm in the shape of a little gold umbrella, which completes her resemblance to Paul Pry. Even mamma laughed when she heard Delia was sporting the Pry umbrella.

No. 10. "Silas Hackett?"

Silas Hackett, architect, has made quite a fortune, and bought a pretty new house for his mother. He asked me to ride with him the other day, to Poonoosac, and what do you suppose this old stupid thing said? "No, thank you, sir. I have an engagement; but Sharly would be *so* glad to go!" I knew she was longing for a new bonnet, and poor old Dozey is dead, you remember; so the words slipped out before I thought, and I haven't dared look at Mr. Hackett since. He seemed greatly amused, but didn't invite Sharly. People are wondering if he and Judith Willard will renew their engagement, which was broken so long ago. For the romance of the thing, I do hope they will.

Is this all? I believe so. Di, you are a natural gossip.

Do come in July. Every soul of our family, and everybody you knew in the village, sends love and wants to see you. Here is my hand and seal upon that.

HELEN ASBURY.

CHAPTER XIV.

ASHES OF ROSES.

DEAR DI: "Gray with death shall never fail." "Half cup sugar, one cup molasses, little butter melted in, little ginger; roll it hard."

There, this is an old sheet of paper on which I began a letter long ago, and I turned it into a German translation, then into a recipe. Such is life, Di. Things run right in together just like that. Now it's June 15th, and I'll go back to you. First and foremost, we were startled this morning by the tragic announcement, —

"The striped bug has come!" I've been out helping Thurzy try to save the cucumbers, and — Here Helen was interrupted by Sharly, who came fluttering into the garden chamber with a camp-stool in her hands, exclaiming, —

"Don't you smell smoke?"

"No, I don't smell it. Where have you been? What makes you look so wild?"

"Why, I was just sitting out there on the terrace, and such a fright as I had! I rushed into the kitchen, and there was Thurzy blacking the stove, as if she was 'sick and tired o' sin;' so it can't be our house. I smell it a little up in this chamber, but not much. Why, Helen, what's the matter with your nose?"

"Tired, perhaps, like the rest of me," replied Helen, thrusting the benumbed member out of the window, and sniffing vigorously. "Well, yes, there is smoke in the air, and a haze, too. I shouldn't wonder if the woods were on fire; they must be so very dry. Seems to me I never knew such a drought. The flowers did look so discouraged. I can tell you, Sharly, they thanked me well for the drink I gave them all round."

"You'll kill yourself carrying water out to the garden," said Sharly, with a twinge of self-reproach. "But come, let us go up in the attic, and see if we can see fire anywhere."

"Nonsense, Sharly! you're so sensational!" yawned Helen, thridding her fingers through her dark hair, which was running riot over the shoulders of her white wrapper. "Just run up and see for yourself, if you want to, but don't come in here again — there's a good girl — for I want to write a letter."

Sharly tripped away, and Helen sat gazing at her beloved garden in a half dream. Everything seemed so sweet and drowsy out there, as if Nature were ready for an afternoon doze. The woodbine looked in at the window, and caught the curtain in a friendly clasp; the sweetbrier tried to come, too, but was not tall enough, and had to send her regrets. Around the edges of the flower-beds in the garden, Thurzy, ever full of expedients, had set all the leaky pans and tin dishes the house afforded. These dishes were full of water, which slowly trickled out and sank down to the roots of the plants.

"Those flowers do look feverish, after all, poor things! Never you mind, little dears, there'll be rain before night," said Helen to herself. "Joy to the world! the

wind's rising. What a breeze! There's my white rose-bush nodding and snowing roses! What, Sharly, back again? — you sensational girl!"

"Why, Helen Asbury! there *is* a fire! There's a wreath of smoke over there ever so far beyond the Jones's. I think near Captain Coyle's barn. Come, see if you don't think so, too."

Helen toiled wearily up the narrow attic stairs, but before she reached the top the village bell was ringing sharp and quick.

"Yes, you're right, Sharly; it must be Captain Coyle's barn. Too bad! but it isn't as if the captain was poor."

"No," said Sharly; "and it isn't as if it wasn't a red barn, too, right in face and eyes of the house! How Lase always hated that ugly old thing!"

"She'll be glad to see it go," said Helen, reflectively; "but, Sharly, what if their house should take fire! The wind is blowing a gale."

"O, there'll be men enough to put it out," returned Sharly. "Let's go down to the south chamber. I want to get a good look-out on the street, and see if there are many people going up to the fire. Of course the Joneses will go, for it's all in the family. Dear! what an excitement there'll be at the Coyleses!"

Helen, now thoroughly awake, followed her sister down to the south chamber. Yes, indeed! there were plenty of people going up the hill, almost at a run, keeping time to the lively ding-dong of the bell with their clattering pails and dippers, which flashed in the sun.

"Women, too, as true as you live!" said Helen.

Well, well; they are stepping out of their sphere, I should say. Won't they be in the way, think? No, there's Mrs. Willard — she's never in the way!"

"But, see! there's Peeky Liscom!" cried Sharly, "and Miss O'Neil! Glad it isn't *my* barn!"

"Sharly," said Helen, who had been slowly considering the matter, "you run down and see to the children, and ask Thurzy to get us some pails and dippers while I finish dressing. If everybody else is going to the fire, we'll go, too."

"So we will!" said Sharly; "'twill do Lase good to see us, any way. Can't you imagine her running round and round like a crazy thing? Some people do seem to lose their heads so, when they're excited. How do you suppose we should act, Helen, if our house was on fire?"

"I don't know," replied Helen, brushing out her shimmering hair. "One never can tell."

"Well, I just about know I should be calm," said Sharly. "You needn't smile, now; I'm just the person that would. Excitable about little things, you know, but real danger braces me up to just the right pitch."

"It would be real danger, indeed, if one's house should take fire in this little town, where there's no engine, and pretty much all the water gone out of the cistern."

"Ugh! how you make my flesh creep!" cried Sharly; "seems as if I could see fire darting right at us. I want to run out-doors and scream!"

"That would be sensible, really."

"Pshaw! Helen; you know I'm only joking. Thank goodness, we're not the sort of people that have things

happen to us. Father's so remarkably cautious, and all that. But did you ever think, Helen, what you should do in case of fire?"

"Yes. I should go the first thing and take out that little trunk that father keeps in the closet at the head of his bed."

"O, I know — full of bills and deeds."

"Full of government bonds, you silly! Why, Sharly, haven't you heard him say all his available property is in that trunk?"

"Available property? What do you mean by that?"

"All the ready money he has in the world. And he has often said, in case of fire, we must save that trunk, even if we had to let the house go. Mother asked him why he didn't put the bonds in the bank; but he says he's too much afraid of burglars. There, run along, Sharly, and see what's going on down stairs."

Left to herself, Helen made a hasty toilet, and was just fastening her dress, when there was a light tap at the door, which she had no time to answer before Eleonora Jones rushed into the room, her delicate face dyed crimson, and her long hair falling loose to her waist in a golden shower. It was a most remarkable thing for the punctilious Eleonora to do. Had she come all the way from home in that plight? But even while Helen marvelled, she had time to think how beautiful the girl looked, and to recall a couplet descriptive of just such hair, though probably not artificially colored, —

> "Down-gushing in an armful flows,
> And floods her ivory neck, and glitters as she goes."

Recalled it at the very moment she was listening to Eleonora's announcement, —

"Our house is burned to the ground! Can you lend me a hair-pin?"

"Eleonora Jones!" cried Helen, confronting her with a face as pale as ashes. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," replied Eleonora, without tear, or smile, or sigh. "Our house is gone! Where Oscafo-ria's children are, I don't know. The baby I brought down here in my arms."

"Why, Nora, Nora, Nora! I thought it was Captain Coyle's barn that was burning."

"Yes, so it was. We all went up to help save it, and while we were there, a cinder blew down on our roof and set it on fire, and by the time we got there it was too late. Furniture gone, too! I want some hair-pins."

"There's my hair-pin cushion — help yourself," replied Helen, crushing down a wild desire to laugh.

Talking of ruin and desolation, and the state of one's back hair, all in a breath! Still, don't we do it every day?

"But, Eleonora, I don't understand it; your house is so far away from that barn. Of course, Captain Coyle's house is burned, too?"

"No; it wasn't even scorched. The wind didn't blow towards it — it blew right down this way, you see," said Eleonora, gathering up her glittering tresses, and winding them round and round in a hasty bird's-nest.

"O, yes; it blew that cinder down to you; only think of its flying a quarter of a mile!"

As Helen spoke, she involuntarily thrust her head out of the window. There were thread-like films darkening the air, and the trees were rocking wildly.

"Why, Nora! who knows but this house —"

She did not wait to finish the sentence, but rushed down stairs breathless, followed by Eleonora, with hair-pins in her mouth.

"I wish father was at home. Might as well have a tub of water ready. I'll be very careful, though, not to stir up a panic."

Wise Helen! But her caution came a little too late. Forty men, and half as many women, had already stirred up a panic. Old and young, gentle and simple, dippers and pails, ran together before her eyes in a many-colored blur. And the very centre-piece of the blur was a baby-carriage, winding in and out, in and out, as if the six-months'-old passenger were the heart and soul of the proceedings. Helen reached the door-stone, and stood there appalled. From her own window she had seen only floating specks, but here was a thick storm of ashes and cinders, which the ever-increasing wind was hurling straight down from the ruins of the Jones house! The first person she could get speech with was Silas Hackett, who was coming in at the hall door with an unmistakable look of desperation on his face.

"Tell me," gasped Helen, "is the house on fire?"

"No, no; and shan't be, if we can help it. Look up all your old comforters and blankets, and get them out to us on the roof."

"Helen, it's come! it's come! What we've talked about has come! — and father gone, too!" shrieked Sharly, rushing through the entry, with her arms full of glass ware.

"Hush! and behave yourself," said Helen. "Carry

those dishes, and put them down under some trees, and come back to mother."

"Just what I'm doing — just what I started for!" screamed Sharly. "Don't get excited, Helen. Just look at *me ;* I'm perfectly calm!"

Sharly ran a few steps right and left; heard somebody say, "The house is struck!" and, in spite of her calmness, threw the heap of glass ware straight into the gravel-walk, where the triumphant juggernaut wheels of the baby-carriage passed directly over it the next moment, and crushed it.

"If it was *my* house, I wouldn't have such a confusion," growled Miss O'Neil, and somebody found time and spirit, even then, to hum softly the words, —

> "Had I but asked sweet William in,
> Sweet William in, sweet William in."

Meanwhile Helen, who saw Sharly was not in the least to be depended upon, had sent Mrs. Willard to take care of Mrs. Asbury, who was still so ill as to be confined to her room.

"Keep her quiet, Mrs. Willard. Whatever happens, don't let mamma get excited."

Next moment Helen had called together three or four of the most efficient women — how she blessed them now for stepping out of their sphere! — and was rifling closets, and helping carry loads of blankets and coverlets into the attic, to be taken out through the scuttle and spread on the roof.

"Is it afire yet?" screamed Theresa Bumpus, from time to time.

"No, no," answered the men from the outside. "Water! More water!"

A well-organized force of men and boys was marching steadily up and down the stairs, carrying water from the bath-room, the kitchen-pump, and the aqueduct; but the supply from all these sources was getting low, and they must now resort to the river. A despatch had been sent half an hour ago to Poonoosac for an engine, but it could not arrive under another half hour.

"Tell us, Mr. Hackett," said Helen, speaking through the scuttle, "shall we women go to the river, too, or shall we begin to take out the furniture?"

For something in the tone of the men's voices had struck her as insincere, and she could not help suspecting the roof was really on fire.

"You may begin to take out valuable articles; it will do no harm," replied Mr. Hackett, who was installed leader of the amateur fire company; "but you will all be careful not to raise an alarm."

The words were spoken quietly, but the women knew too well what they meant, and Helen's heart sank. The fact was, the roof had already caught in several places, and the flames had been promptly extinguished, but how much longer it would be possible to fight fire, neither Mr. Hackett, nor any other man, could tell; it would depend entirely upon the caprice of the wind.

"Look here, you, Helen, tell us what you want saved first," said Theresa Bumpus, swinging her muscular arms, as the little army of five marched down the dripping attic stairs. "It's lucky you're one of those kind that knows what you're about. I packed Miss O'Neil off, bag and baggage. I couldn't have *her* tewing round."

"Well, Thurzy, you may take out all the trunks you

find in the trunk closet. Mrs. Selden, you go to my wardrobe on the right; Judith Willard, to Sharly's on the left; Mrs. Coyle, to mother's in the blue chamber, and Thurzy, here, to the children's rooms. Pack as fast as you can, and then carry the trunks down stairs. I'll go speak for a wagon," said Helen, who was perhaps never really herself except on great occasions.

It was a satisfaction to know that everything would be done just as she had ordered; but it was not so pleasant to reflect that Peeky Liscom had been prowling about the chambers, may be pocketing stray letters, or scraps of this and that, which could be put together by and by to make out some sort of a story — no mortal could foretell what.

But this was a small provocation, not worth mentioning; and Miss Liscom was gone now; somebody had seen her ride off in a wagon.

Mrs. Asbury had set several ladies to ripping up the parlor carpets; and when Helen went down stairs, she found men carrying out furniture under her direction, while she sat in the front hall, with her bonnet on, and her baby in her arms.

A few frightened ones, like poor Sharly, were flying about as uncertain as the very ashes in the air. Sharly had a battered Berlin iron breastpin in one hand, and a tiny pin-ball in the other, carrying them carefully from room to room; and when she saw Helen, she pressed them upon her, saying, pathetically, —

"I wanted to save a little something; but where shall I put it? Let us be calm, Helen; do let us be calm."

Ozem Page, faithful to his light, was hurrying out at the front door, first with one stove cover, and then

another, which he placed conscientiously on the top of a bushel basket full of the best china.

It was easy to find means to transport the trunks, as plenty of horses were standing outside the gate. One comfortable equipage had just been brought into the yard, and old Judge Davenport came up to assist Mrs. Asbury into it, while Mrs. Willard stood by with the baby.

"Mother, dear mother, keep up good courage," said Helen; "the house may be saved yet."

Mrs. Asbury could have hugged Helen to her heart, but she only said, in a business tone, —

"I've had your father's trunk put in the carriage. Have you seen Bel?"

There was quite a sensation for a moment, till she was discovered bringing water from the river in a porringer.

"Thank God, we are all here!" said Mrs. Asbury, seating herself in the carriage, one arm round Bel, the other round the baby, and her feet on the precious trunk.

There was no longer any doubt about the fate of the house. The men had ceased telling their well-meant falsehoods — it was actually in flames. While they had been working on the roof, a firebrand had dashed against the kitchen window, where nobody was on guard, doing irreparable mischief. The wind, which had been all the while increasing, now blew a hurricane. It was no use fighting against such odds; the house was going, and those brave men knew it — knew it, but, choked and blinded, they still worked on.

"Pretty hard on Squire Asbury," they thought, "to

"She was discovered bringing water from the river in a porringer." — Page 138.

come home to a heap of ashes;" and not a man there but would almost have put his right hand into the flames for the sake of the poor Squire.

"Let's save the doors and blinds, boys!" cried the leader, at last, not confessing even then that he gave up the house.

But why linger here among these brave hearts defeated, when we have not so much as a dipper of water to cool one of the tongues of flame?

Good by, dear old house! happy home! Good by, elm trees! — star-proof, but not fire-proof. Good by, white rosebush! you will never more "snow roses." Little flowers, stand and meet your fate! — it is not given to all of us to run away from the evil that pursues us.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GREEN TRUNK.

HELEN thought her cup was full; but there were worse drops to come.

"Where are we going?" asked she, as she found herself in somebody's carriage — she didn't know whose — riding down street, with her three sisters on a roll of carpeting. "Where can we go? I never thought of that!"

"Why, we supposed you'd naturally want to be taken to your grandfather's old place," replied Mr. Applebee, the driver. "Mrs. Page sent word she expected you, and your mother is there."

Helen almost caught the reins out of the man's hands. But wait: was there any other place in town where it would be possible for the whole family to go, and be made welcome? And as for separation, that was too dreadful just now.

"Not Mrs. Page's!" cried Sharly. "Let me out! I won't go there a step!"

"Hush!" whispered Helen, clutching her arm. "Let's be thankful it isn't aunt Marian's."

Sharly stifled her moans. Not that a groan more or less signified much just at this time, for the air was full of the clang, clang of the Poonoosac engine, and the shouts of its full corps of firemen.

"Well, well, you've got along at last, have you, with your sounding brass and tinkling cymbals? Hullo there!" shouted Mr. Applebee. "It's no use to lock the stable door after the horse is stolen."

"Came as quick as we could," retorted the firemen. "Can't make an elephant trot."

"That's so," said Mr. Applebee, more amiably. "All right. And now if you want to save the bridge, and the rest of the village, you are welcome."

The rest of the village! So it was all going, perhaps. Why not? The people along the street were drawing water with might and main, or climbing their own roofs, to lie in wait for the enemy.

"Glad of it!" wailed Sharly; "hope every house will go! What do we care now? Other folks may just as well be turned out of house and home as we."

"Yes, glad of it," responded Vic, pirouetting on a roll of carpeting. "Guess folks'll find out how good it is!"

"So do I!" chimed in less agile Van, attempting also to pirouette, but receiving a backward twitch from Helen just in time to save her from going under the wheels.

As the carriage, with its load of heavy hearts, was turning the corner, it was stopped by Mrs. Nason, the village washerwoman, who came out of her house brandishing a blanket.

"O, but I must speak to you, girls," cried she, with streaming eyes. "Bless your hearts, every one of you! I'd sooner have spared any house in town than yours! I wanted to go up and help, but you know I'm just off my bed, and so all I could do was to pray. I just be-

seeched the Lord to turn the wind to the west, but he wouldn't hear."

"Come up to me, Mrs. Nason; I want to get hold of you," said Helen.

And clasping the faithful old creature's neck, she hid her hot, tearless face against the bosom of red and green calico, while Mrs. Nason sobbed forth tumultuously, —

"There, there! your time will come to cry. I was so loaded for a while I couldn't; but now I've got started, and can't stop. All I have to say is, Helen, the Lord holds the winds in the hollers of his fists, and if so be he'd been a mind to —"

"I know it, Mrs. Nason, I know it."

"And if so be we're Christians," said Mrs. Nason, wiping her eyes on the blanket, — "there! I can't talk for choking. And your poor pa gone, that never knows a word about it! O, what a silly woman I am — stopping the wagon to comfort you, and behaving like this! Drive on, Mr. Applebee — no, wait a minute! — how did Captain Coyle's barn get afire?"

"*Sot*," replied Mr. Applebee, laconically.

"You don't say so — the thief and villain! Drive on, Mr. Applebee. Bless you, children! there's bright spots yet in your lives."

And, overcome by this last attempt at consolation, as well as the news that the fire had been *sot*, Mrs. Nason buried her head in the wet blanket, and sobbed aloud.

"Look here, now," said Mr. Applebee, as he drove off, "wish we could have had the old lady up there to cry on your roof; she plays about as well as the Poonoosac engine, when she gets a start."

Helen knew this display of wit was made on purpose to raise the spirits of the party; but it was impossible for any one to laugh.

"Look o' here!" he added, "the wind's turning; do you notice how it's lulled down? Pity the old lady hadn't gone to praying a little sooner, so as to have saved your house. But I reckon she has saved the village; so we'll try to be thankful."

The wind had indeed spent its fury. As the carriage drove into Mr. Page's yard, the trees merely bowed a faint welcome, the grass nodded drowsily, and there was no end to the happy insects which were fluttering their tiny wings, and bursting their wee sides with happy noises.

"Well, that hurricane seemed to be raised just for your especial benefit," said Mr. Applebee — "yours and the Joneses. There won't be another house burned in the village, now the engine is come — you see if there is!"

"O dear, dear!" wailed the twins, as if the thought of saving the village was the final blow.

"O, Helen," whispered Sharly, "I've a great mind to say I'll never go into this house. There's Dorcas coming out to condole, and Ozem behind her. And, Helen Asbury, let's die, and be done with it; there's Peeky Liscom!"

Through the side door they got a view of the sloppy kitchen, for Mrs. Page usually washed it the last thing before dying, and why not now on the solemn occasion of fire?

"To think your pa should have let the insurance run out!" groaned she, rolling down her sleeves, and coming out to the carriage, with a sigh. "O, Helen, why didn't he have it renewed?"

It was the first time Helen had heard or thought of insurance.

"'Twasn't a mite like Squire Asbury not to have it renewed," added Ozem, who always considered it safe to second his wife's remarks.

"Where's mamma?" cried the children.

"In the parlor. Walk on your tiptoes," said Mrs. Page, with that peculiar solemnity of tone suggestive of going in to look at the remains of a friend. She referred, however, to the dampness of the kitchen floor.

"Is this all the carpeting you saved?" queried Miss Liscom. "Where's that best rug, with roses and buds? I meant to have attended to that. I saw you needed a head, but your mother sent me off on a load of things, for Mrs. Page was having a dying turn."

The invalid looked exultant.

"Yes; I appeared to be just alive when she got here, and not a soul to do for me. Your mother knew how it would be."

"Hysterieky as a witch," whispered Delia to Sharly as Mrs. Page explored the basket of china.

"Deliver me from my friends!" thought Helen, edging into the house between a pair of piano legs and a row of trunks; for Delia was saying, in a softly modulated tone of sympathy, —

"Now, you needn't feel as if you were deserted, girls. I'll stay and help you look over these things. — Why, I don't see anything of that green and white carpeting that was in the front chamber. Somebody ought to have ripped it up. Come, let's sit down and count the spoons."

"No consequence about that," said Helen; "if there are any missing, we can't help it now."

"People didn't know what they were about, not half of them," sobbed Sharly, who had been crying ever since she saw Mrs. Nason; "but I'm sure *I* did the very best *I* could. Don't you think I was very calm, Helen?"

"As calm as most of us; it was a crazy time," replied Helen, kissing her, and remembering the pincushion and breastpin the poor child had saved, and presented her with the air of a tragedy queen; but it would be cruel to speak of that now. Let her have the comfort of thinking she had distinguished herself, for everything was going to press very hard upon dear little Sharly.

It would be worse for her than for all the rest, so Helen honestly believed. As for her own share of the loss, she had not got so far as to think of that yet. Sharly first, then father, mother, and the children, and, by and by, when she found time, she would mourn for herself. I think, for my part, Helen's habitual care for others was one secret of her remarkable self-control.

Mrs. Asbury was sitting by the west window, propped up in a splint rocking-chair, with her feet on the little green trunk; and when Helen entered the parlor, and saw her there, her heavy heart lightened.

"Mother, mother! home isn't all gone yet," said she, crying for the first time in all that dreadful day. "Here you are—you and the little green trunk."

"Helen Asbury, the toilet-glass that belongs in your chamber is all shivered to bits," broke in Miss Liscom, in tones of exasperating sympathy.

"Who *do* you suppose set those stove-covers on top of the china?" cried Mrs. Page, coming in with her apron full of broken cups and saucers.

"Do, please, throw them away," said Mrs. Asbury. "I saw enough horrors when somebody seized my best shawl and rolled some eggs in it."

Mrs. Page stared in amazement, for Mrs. Asbury was laughing, and so was Helen — a little hysterically, perhaps, but actually laughing.

"Here's another load coming!" exclaimed Miss Liscom, elevating her eye-glass; "mops, ragbags — and if there isn't Sharly's very curling-stick rolling on top!"

"O, see if they've brought my nice dresses," cried Sharly; "they might, only everybody was so bewildered, you know."

"Your dresses are all in the trunks, dear."

"Why, Helen, are you perfectly sure? My blue poplin? my lavender silk? my India muslin?"

"Yes, every single one."

"O, bless you forever! But my jewel-box, Helen, and my glove-box? — of course you couldn't think of those; and my beautiful new tucked skirts, and my — my French kid boots. O dear! O dear!"

"All in the trunks. Now say thank you."

Sharly was so deeply grateful, and smiled so prettily through her tears, that Helen was amply repaid for her thoughtfulness.

"And, Helen," said Mrs. Asbury, "I hope you saved your watch?"

"Why, mother Asbury, I didn't! As true as you live, I forgot it entirely!"

"You poor, dear soul!" said Sharly, whose own watch was safe at the jeweller's; "I'm so very, very sorry. I went up in your chamber once, and almost

took it out of the case; but then I remembered my new bonnet, and went to get that."

"Did you save the bonnet?" asked Vic.

"No; but it's here. I did my very best, Vic; but anybody can't be perfectly calm at such times — can they, Helen?"

"No, indeed! Only think, Sharly, what we were saying when we smelt smoke, wondering how we should feel in case of fire! Doesn't it seem as if it was a week ago? — no, a month?"

Ah! if they could only be left alone to talk it over! But there was Miss Liscom, still pursuing her investigations.

"Where are all the rose blankets? I know you had a great many."

"Mostly on the roof. They called for all the woollen things we could find. O, Miss Liscom," added Helen, a bright thought striking her, "do you suppose there are any things left lying outside our fence, that the men have forgotten to bring away?"

"Shouldn't wonder at all. There ought to be a head to see to that!" exclaimed Delia; and as her own head was obviously the very one needed, she bonneted it at once, and called out to Mr. Willard, who had come with the last load, that she was ready to ride back with him. She had the Joneses to think of, and the Coyles, and everybody would be anxious to know how the Asburys were enduring their affliction. She thought that she should report that Sharly took it to heart more than the rest. And then there was a letter in her pocket which she must read over again the first moment she could be alone. It was from Mr. Lynde to Mrs. Asbury,

and she had found it in a bureau drawer; but all is fair in love and fires to such people as Delia.

It was a beautiful letter, describing places where he had travelled; but "Peeky" had found time to read it all, and there was only one thing in it that concerned her personally. It was this: —

"No, dearest aunt, my heart's desire is not yet granted; but absence does not bring forgetfulness; on the contrary, the longing only grows stronger, and the denial seems only the more cruel. Yet what can I do but wait?"

Now what was all this about? He was evidently in love; but with whom? It might be her own dear self, and in that case could anything be more touching, more sweetly expressed? But if, as she could not help fearing, the cruel fair one was somebody else, (for when had Delia ever been "cruel"?) why, then how foolishly sentimental it did look in a man of his age!

"Peeky" was already punished for her unprincipled conduct by the dreadful curiosity which raged within her, and must continue to rage without satisfaction; for how *could* she find out the rest of the puzzle? She would almost give her right hand to know whom it could be that Mr. Lynde was waiting for; but, alas! she had brought upon herself a "waiting" more insupportable than his; and all she could do was to bite her finger-nails for rage. Still she did not forget to watch for the stage, and return to the Pages a few minutes after she saw Mr. Asbury alight at the gate.

Helen had been saying, "Poor papa! how shall we meet him?" And Mrs. Asbury had replied, —

"O, I am very sure he will bear up bravely;" when

he came up the short path, walking tremulously, like a prematurely old man.

The girls all ran out to meet him, and the twins exclaimed, dramatically, —

"You've got something left, papa — you've got us!"

"Tell me," cried Mr. Asbury, without stopping for sentiment, "tell me if you saved my buff linen coat?"

"Where was it, dear?" asked Mrs. Asbury, who had risen from her cushioned chair, and looked a little bewildered by such an unexpected question.

"In the entry closet."

"No, papa," said Helen; "I don't believe anybody saw it, or thought of it. Did you say your buff linen coat? Why, what of that? We saved the little green trunk."

"There was nothing in it worth saving," gasped Squire Asbury; "I took the coupon bonds out of it yesterday."

"O, father! father!"

"While I was talking with Judge Davenport in the library, I took them out and put them in my coat pocket, for the first time in my life. I know I did, for I recollected it the moment I got into the cars."

"What is it he forgot? What is it? what is it?" cried Delia Liscom, entering unannounced.

"Don't tell her!" shrieked Vic.

"We have lost everything we had in the world, Miss Liscom — that is all; do you hear?" said Helen, calmly.

"William, dear William, don't look so, don't feel so," said Mrs. Asbury, going up to her husband, regardless of the intruder's presence, and clasping him in her arms. "It must be right somehow, William. 'God bless all our losses'!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AT SISTER PAGE'S.

"THERE don't seem to be any sacredness at Sister Page's about Sunday; they don't even have baked beans for breakfast," said Miss Bumpus, as she rode home that evening with Mr. Applebee, who lived in the Wix neighborhood, only three doors from her father's. "It is a dreadful lonesome thing to wake up there a Sunday and hear Sister Page groan; and I do pity the Asburys from the bottom of my heart, but I don't see as I can do 'em any good by staying, and my room is needed more than my company."

There was not a more attractive spot in town than "the old Dillingham place," now rented by Mr. and Mrs. Ozem Page. The broad village street was lined on either side with grand old elms, which met overhead and clasped hands; and at the end of this vista of trees stood a white story-and-a-half cottage, dripping all over with woodbine and clematis. The very corn and potatoes which flourished right and left had a poetical look. In front was a lovely garden, and beyond the garden sparkled the river. A delightful place; yet the Asbury family never approached it without a tremor. The blinds were generally closed, and the curtains clung like shrouds, for Mrs. Page was a born invalid, and

knew better than to be cured by sunshine when there is so much patent medicine in the world. And when the light was let in, you were obliged to "wink" at a great deal of dirt, as Thurzy said, for Sister Page was a "slack piece, any way you could fix it."

She always complained that she wasn't able to do the work for two, and Mrs. Asbury wondered what would become of her now, with nine? But she could do no more than die — there was that consolation. To Mrs. Asbury's relief, however, Mrs. Page's spirits rose with the occasion; for in the course of a day or two the four girls, with Helen at their head, assumed entire charge of the house, Mrs. Page undertaking no duties except washing and putting away a few sacred dishes which had belonged to her *dear* mother. These she wiped mournfully and tenderly, and never intrusted to any other hands than her own. She really enjoyed the addition to her family. Other people's troubles always raised the tone of her spirits, and she was so much interested in cousin William's haggard appearance, that she forgot to look at her tongue before eating, and never once gave Ozem the usual directions about her grave-clothes during breakfast.

Squire Asbury was really in very poor health, and, though he would not have let Mrs. Page know it on any account, he had had, since the fire, some mild symptoms of paralysis. There was a partial numbness of the right arm and side, and he could not feel his watch-key when he wound his watch, or use his hand freely enough to make his writing quite legible. Dr. Prescott assured him such symptoms frequently disappeared as a patient gained strength; he had been overdoing;

he must rest, perhaps for a year. This was rather hard for a man in the prime of life, with a good prospect of going to Congress. How could he rest a year? What, meantime, would become of his family? There was very little property left now but the old Dillingham place, the burnt land of Jubilee Hill, a few acres of wood lot, and some outstanding debts, which he was by no means sure of collecting. But he stood high in his profession, and if he could only have his health, was ready to begin the world anew with good courage.

"That fire was a mysterious providence," said the neighbors. "It seems hard enough for the Joneses, though they are left better off, even now, than the rest of us; but poor Squire Asbury! — it does beat all!"

Such sudden reverses are very rare in a country village, and when they do occur, the unfortunate victims may be pretty sure of hearty sympathy.

Delia Liscom, whose best trait was her liberality, would gladly have given all the Asburys a home at her father's, if she had been the head of the family. Even Miss O'Neil misquoted Scripture to Mrs. Asbury, to comfort her, instead of wounding her feelings.

"'We have a house not made with hands — an eternal one in the heavens,'" said she, taking the lady's hands in hers; "so, if Jubilee Hill did burn up, and if Mr. McGrath did cheat me out of my property, we'll both have a house to live in after we die."

Mrs. Asbury tried not to smile at this odd way of twisting the Scriptures, but to accept gratefully the old lady's attempt at consolation.

Miss O'Neil had learned to love the squire's wife as much as it was possible for her to love any human be-

ing; and when she scolded about her, it was in a mild way, merely to find fault with her cooking; for when Mrs. Asbury had sent her soups flavored with summer savory, and mince pies lacking suet, of course it was her duty to tell her how such things were made at Machias.

In September the Hinsdales returned from Europe, and aunt Marian was full of suggestions in regard to her homeless relatives. She would take Sharly and the twins, she said; but she did not, for they would not go. Well, what was to be done? "She should advise taking boarders." That was out of the question, for Mr. Asbury needed quiet. "Let him go away for his health." But he was really unable to travel alone. "Well, then, Helen must do something. If she were only practical; or if Sharly only had her strength."

For Sharly was always going to aunt Marian, and saying, —

"Please suggest something for me to do, aunty. I long to work for poor papa and the children; and nobody can advise me so well as you."

Helen never asked counsel; and was it strange aunt Marian should call Sharly "a dear child — all Dillingham," and Helen "an odd girl, who would not amount to anything, she feared?" To be sure, Sharly never availed herself of the valuable advice she received; but aunt Marian did not for a moment lose faith in her "practical turn of mind."

"There is your music, Sharly; you know you have a perfect genius for that."

"O, aunty, my genius, as you call it, is the very trouble. I can't read music worth a pin, for I play by ear — don't you know? It's a great pity, but I really

can't learn the stupid notes half as well as Helen can. Helen, now, could teach nicely, if she only thought so."

"Well, a school, then, as you are so very anxious to do something, Sharly — a district school, say. Your uncle might look up one somewhere."

"What! little me teaching school? O, aunty, the boys would take me by the shoulders and put me out of doors; and how ashamed I should be! Helen has dignity — but I haven't a bit. Do tell me something easier, for I'm just wild to be at work."

She did look too pretty to be shut up in a schoolroom, and the very mention of such a thing had set her to trembling. Mrs. Hinsdale thought how hard it would have been for her petted sister, Adelaide, to see her children brought to the strait of earning their own living, and the pity of it stung her to sharp words, as her pity always did.

"What is Helen about all this time that she is willing to live at Mr. Page's in this way?"

Helen was busy enough, and her head was full of projects; but as she talked of them only to her parents and Di Cary, aunt Hinsdale was none the wiser. Di, and Di's brother, were running about the city of New York, answering advertisements, asking questions, and doing whatever their kind hearts prompted, "to get poor Helen into business."

Meanwhile Mr. Asbury, sitting in his lounging-chair, was kept informed of these repeated attempts and failures, for Helen let him read all the brisk correspondence, and really made her search for employment appear like a choice bit of fun. Mr. Asbury needed to be amused, and "How shall we interest papa?" was a

question Helen asked every day of her sisters. He missed the old home, but he must not miss the home joys, the family concerts, the little plays and surprises.

When the baby was troublesome, Helen insisted upon removing him to the attic, so father need not hear him cry; and when Mrs. Page died, or the kitchen chimney smoked, or some new loss by the fire came to light, Helen and her mother were both on the alert to keep it from father, "it would worry him so." Sharly flew about from house to house bewailing the family woes, and was so sweet and confiding that everybody's heart warmed towards the pretty creature; but Helen was busy at home. She might not be practical by nature; she liked many other things better than housework; but that was the nearest duty, and she tried to do it "cheerfully, like a child of God." But she failed sometimes.

"Mother," said she one morning, when the wind blew the wrong way, and the kitchen chimney had the blues, "don't you miss our old home — the very walls of it, the furniture, the dishes, the pump in the sink, so it seems as if you couldn't bear it another minute? If I could only see one of the children's mugs, I'd kiss it — or even an iron spoon."

"Yes; I dreamed of the tea-kettle last night," replied Mrs. Asbury, with a pathetic smile.

"And, mother, whether that fire was '*sot*' or not, I do say it is a cruel thing; and if you'll let me, I'm going to cry."

The words were playful, but the tone was hard, and instead of tears, there was the old, rebellious fire in Helen's eyes.

Mrs. Asbury drew nearer.

"We must get a little higher up, Helen, and then our trials won't affect us so much. You remember when we were on Mount Washington, how we enjoyed putting the clouds under our feet?"

"O, mother, I'm ashamed to have you try to comfort me when your own heart is breaking. It is you who have the most to bear, and I say it is too much. I cry out with Jean Paul, 'The dream of life is dreamed upon too hard a bed.'"

She gazed sternly out of the window as she spoke, at the dry, despairing garden.

"Yes, we are just beginning to think so; but haven't we had a soft bed until now? I confess it never seems quite right to me to see everything go so smoothly, Helen. I feel a little safer when I am in trouble."

Was ever such a sweet voice, such a patient smile? Helen caught her mother's hand and kissed it.

"I wish I could accept the inevitable, as you and cousin Morris do."

"Well, you are young, dear. We must be in the world some time before we learn that God is making use of our trials to draw us up higher."

"Do you think I shall ever learn, mother? I believe it while you are saying it; I feel rebuked, and exalted, too; but after you are done talking, the old, bitter feeling comes back. I do wish I were like you and Morris, for the very worst things don't crush you, or him either."

"The very worst has not come yet," returned Mrs. Asbury, in a low, controlled voice, which thrilled Helen, and brought tears to her eyes.

No, it could not be said that the worst had come, while her father still lived.

"Mother, there's somebody down stairs would like to see you and Helen," cried Vic, flashing into the room, with her hands before her laughing face.

"Cousin Morris!" exclaimed Helen, with sudden clairvoyance.

"Impossible!" said Mrs. Asbury; "he didn't say a word in his last letter about coming home."

Still they both ran down stairs in a pleasant flutter, such as they had not felt in the last dreary month.

"Why, Helen, I don't believe you fairly know me," said Mr. Lynde, laughing, as she stood with her hand in his, gazing wonderingly in his face.

"I didn't suppose anybody could look so much better," stammered she, rather incoherently.

He smiled at that. She, too, was vastly improved in a certain way within the last two years, though he would not tell her so.

"It was only the white ashes of me that you used to see, Helen, which accounts for your surprise."

And now, surely, "beauty for ashes" had been given him — a clear, healthful color, a bright eye, erect figure, and firm step.

"The doctors all doomed me, aunt Katharine, but I've come back to humble them, and make them repent their rashness."

Mrs. Asbury could hardly speak for joy.

"We are all so glad, so very glad to see you!" cried Shardy, always readier with words than Helen.

If Mr. Lynde had considered the eldest sister improved, what must he think of this exquisite creature?

Sharly knew her eyes looked just now like dewy violets, and her crimped hair like spun gold, and was very glad she happened to be dressed for a call, and had put in her earrings.

Helen had been sweeping the chambers, and her dress was a chocolate print, with a linen collar at the throat, which always gave her an "adust" complexion; but after all she was exquisitely nice — she could not be otherwise, for neatness was her birthright. And there had always been a certain indefinable elegance about Helen, over and above mere spotlessness of attire, which I can only describe by saying she looked as if her thoughts were of high things. This refinement had become more marked than ever, it seemed to Mr. Lynde, who had his own criterion of faces, and saw deeper than color or outline.

Not a word yet about the family losses.

"You find us greatly changed, Morris," began Mr. Asbury; but not feeling equal to such a painful subject, he broke off, and added, with a smile, "Why, has nobody thought to bring you that baby?"

The smile showed how the wrinkles had gathered around his deep-set eyes. Mr. Lynde found the Asburys changed, indeed; but the greatest change of all was in the head of the family.

"There! you meant to ask for him, didn't you? — and isn't he a darling?" said Helen, who had been out of the room long enough to seize Master Nameless, and adorn him with a clean white apron.

It always brightened Mr. Asbury to see his young son and heir.

"What do you think of that face?" said he, with

animation; "we say it isn't Asbury or Carver — it's Morris Lynde in miniature."

The resemblance was not to be ignored.

"Come to my arms, you little rogue!" said Mr. Lynde, delighted with his first infant relative, "and tell me if you'll receive me into the family?"

Little Nameless crowed his entire willingness to do so, and emphasized the remark by a twitch of the blonde whiskers.

"I have it!" said Mr. Asbury, with sudden enlightenment; "name him Morris Melzar."

The girls clapped their hands.

"No," said mamma, smiling; "call him Morris William."

So, after long waiting, the baby had a name at last.

"Helen," said Mr. Lynde, as he sat with Bel on one knee, and Morris William on the other, "what if I should tell you of a conspiracy going on in New York to get you away from Quinnebasset?"

"Me?"

"And, furthermore, that one of the conspirators is in this very house?"

"In the closet!" cried Vic; "and I knew it all the time!"

A sudden raid upon the closet, and behold! Di Cary! Helen screamed ecstatically, as she emerged like the genius out of the magic bottle, for the old school friends were the warmest of lovers, and to Helen this was an entirely unexpected pleasure.

"'They met like Righteousness and Peace, and kissed each other,'" said Mr. Lynde, smiling.

As if those quiet words conveyed the least idea of

the tumultuous scene! There was a great deal said in a very short time; but the girls could not fully express their feelings till they had gone away to laugh and cry by themselves in the garden.

"You're as small and graceful as ever, you little fairy," said Helen, "and you talk just as fast and as foolishly."

"And you're as tall as ever, you great giantess, and go on wearing linen collars that make you look like a fright; but O, Helen, you've got the same big, faithful eyes, and you haven't cried all the shine out of them; I'm so glad of that."

"Well, tell me over again how you came here."

"Why, Mr. Lynde called to see us the moment he landed, and we began at once to talk of you and your troubles, and he said, 'She shall paint pictures — that's her best way.'"

"O, Di, you know that is what I used to talk about; but I'd given it all up, for I'm very faulty, and nobody here can teach me properly."

"Listen; you shouldn't have interrupted. Mr. Lynde is going to teach you 'Let's get her to New York,' said he; and he is going to help you, and he'll let me take lessons, too."

"How kind."

"Yes, Helen; and you will live with us, just as we planned so long ago. Papa and mamma both insist upon it, and sent me to fetch you."

"You good Di!"

"Yes, wasn't I good to come against my will! Why, I want you so — I need you so, and I was afraid Mr. Lynde wouldn't be eloquent enough, for he wouldn't

understand that part of it, you know; so papa said I'd better come myself and present the case very strongly. Why don't you smile?"

"Because I can't fairly believe it yet. If anything is particularly nice, it can't be meant for me — 'seems if,' as Mr. Page says," said Helen, smiling now a little sadly.

"Why, you're all out of spirits, dear. It must have a very blueing effect to live with that woman. She and her husband were chasing a chicken as we drew near the house, and we heard her say, 'There, Ozem, don't say *hen* to me again!' She looked so perfectly discouraged, and he stared about so bewildered, that I had to hide my head behind my parasol."

Then the girls both laughed.

"I have been bewailing your misfortune to Mr. Lynde, Helen, and what do you suppose he said?"

"I can't imagine."

"He said perhaps it wasn't a misfortune at all — not for you; perhaps it would bring out your powers. He thinks we never can tell at the time of it what's a misfortune and what isn't."

"Well, really, Di, I hadn't thought of that."

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. LYNDE'S SUGGESTION.

"Shrink not from daring deeds,
For earnest hearts shall find their dreams fulfilled."

BUT there were so many objections to the plan.

"You mustn't go, Helen; 'twill be dreadfully lonesome," pleaded Sharly. "And just think what people will say about me, — 'that lazy girl that lets her sister take all the care of the family'!"

Sharly was sure if Helen would only stay at home, they two could perhaps do something together somewhere and some time; she did not have the least idea what it would be, or where they could go; but O, there was no sacrifice she wasn't ready to make — by and by! Sharly was perfectly sincere; but in her gay, harmless life thus far nothing particular had ever been expected of her, and she *couldn't* toughen herself all at once into a working-woman, this pretty child.

Aunt Marian frowned upon Helen's undertaking, and said it was "eminently unpractical." Helen had not gone to her at the first moment to ask advice, and that was half the trouble.

"Why don't you take a school?"

"I can't find one, auntie; you know how I've been trying."

Mrs. Hinsdale did know; but she replied, uncompromisingly, —

"Teaching is safe business, Helen, and you are fond of children. But as for drawing — what talent have you for it? Not more than your mother had, certainly, and what did her pictures ever amount to?"

Helen almost caught her breath, as if cold water had been dashed in her face.

"Mamma was not instructed," said she.

But she did not know that it was aunt Marian herself who had held her back, and told grandpa Dillingham it was a waste of money to give Adelaide lessons in painting. Adelaide had been of a yielding temper, quite different from her daughter Helen, and as Marian was the eldest child, with great administrative ability, she had ruled the Dillingham family very much as she pleased.

"Well, Helen," said gentle uncle Charles, as he met his niece coming from the house, "you have been talking with your aunt Marian, I know by the waked-up look on your face; for her words have all the effect of a tonic sometimes."

Bitter enough, Helen thought; but here was dear uncle Charles, who had been obliged to swallow this same wholesome tonic for a quarter of a century, yet had never been seen to make a wry face; so she laughed it off, and passed on.

"Cousin Morris," said she, going up to Mr. Lynde, as he stood in the garden looking at the river that "went slowly," "you are very kind and good — you want to help us; but do you really think it's worth while for me to go to New York?"

"Helen, you have the same eyes you used to have, that gaze straight into one's soul, as if they were looking for the truth."

Helen turned them away quickly.

"Well, it's the truth I want. Aunt Marian makes me feel perfectly sanguine of a failure — she thinks I've no talent. Now I know very well I shall never be a Rosa Bonheur, or an Eliza Greatoreux; but can I learn to paint really good pictures?"

"Yes."

"There! that revives me, cousin Morris."

"We can't transcend the clay we're made of, Helen. I won't pretend to say how much is in you, for I don't know; but one thing is certain — you can at least succeed in making clever pictures, for you have the rare good sense to be willing to begin at the beginning and go up slowly. I remember how patiently you can work."

After this, Helen never questioned Morris on the subject again; her determination was fixed, and she never wavered from it for a moment. But how could she leave home? The question was answered by the timely return of Sister Bumpus, who declared if she could come and "work her board," she should be perfectly happy. She never could stay at home long without being homesick; and she "spent the heft of her time," she said, "running to the window to look for teams from the village."

Theresa did not add that she had just decided to go to "the factory," when she met Delia Liscom the night before, and learned of Helen's project. Delia had heard it all from the talkative Diantha, who boarded at the

Liscoms for the few days she was in Quinnebasset, and delighted Delia's heart by her readiness to answer questions.

Mr. Lynde was secretly resolved that Theresa should be rewarded for her labor of love; but the good soul knew nothing of that — she only thought she would "help the family over this hard place for the present, and then perhaps things would come round so she could go to the factory, come another winter."

"Now," said Theresa, rolling up her sleeves, and blacking Mrs. Page's stove with a vim that carried a sense of comfort and relief to tired Mrs. Asbury; "now I don't see any excuse why them twins can't go to school. Seems to me I heard something said about their leaving off, to help round the house; but of course that's nonsense when I'm here."

"So, now, I suppose it's decided that Helen will go; and after all, painting *is* rather distinguished, and not half as bad as being a shop-girl or dressmaker," said Sharly, who took a more cheerful view of life since Theresa had come, and she need not wash any more dishes. "But, dear, dear! to think of our having to work, Sister Bumpus! Why can't we be set back where we were before the fire?"

"Because you can't — and that's reason enough. If I was you, Sharly, I *would* try to have a little strength of mind; don't you suppose you could if you should try? I haven't been here but a day, and I've heard you talk half a dozen times a'ready about losing your property. You'll get as bad as Norah O'Neil, if you don't look out."

"Well, if I'd been born a man I wouldn't care,"

pouted pink and white Sharly, vexed at this plain talk; "for then I'd support the family. O, I wish I was a man!"

"That's the beatermost speech! What if I should set up and wish I was handsome? If wishes were horses, then beggars might ride."

"Sharly doesn't appreciate the high privilege of being a woman," said Mrs. Asbury, smiling, as she looked up from the ironing table.

"Now, mamma, when men have all the strength and power!"

"But men are not as much beloved as women, my dear, and not as unselfish."

"O, I never thought of that."

"But look here, Mrs. Asbury, there's an odds in men, and there's an odds in women, too."

"I know it, Theresa; but I am speaking of them both as a class. I believe we women have in the main fuller and richer lives than men have — don't you?"

Theresa had never looked at it in that light, but had the highest respect for Mrs. Asbury's opinions.

"Well, I don't know. Life seems to be a horrid grind to some women. Now, there's —" She pointed with her finger to the bedroom door. "If some folks should finish themselves off with laudanum, I don't know but I'd a'most bear 'em out in it!"

"Yes," said Helen, laughing; "and really I don't know what mamma means by richer and fuller lives. Why, women suffer more than men — ever and ever so much more."

"Why so?"

"Because they can, mamma; they are more capable of suffering."

Mrs. Asbury set down her flat-iron, and looked up triumphantly.

"Well, if I were a lawyer, I should say I had got my case! The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is exactly balanced — everybody admits that; therefore, by your own confession, Helen, women can be happier than men."

"Mrs. Asbury," said Thurzy, admiringly, "you'd make a tip-top lawyer!"

> "'Chords that vibrate sweetest pleasure,
> Thrill the deepest notes of woe,'"

repeated Helen.

Yes, her mother was right; it really was a high privilege to be a woman — that is, if one would only make the very best of one's self, and not fret about limitations.

No one but Mrs. Asbury gave Mr. Lynde due credit for assuming the task of instructing these two girls. She knew it was a great sacrifice, for she remembered that he had always said he would never consent to take a pupil; he had not the time to spare.

Helen's outfit was soon ready. Di had a soul above clothes; but she did feel a little dismayed as she saw her friend's dresses spread out, one after another, on the star bedquilt up stairs. They were all very well for Quinnebasset; but New York requirements are so different! Pity Helen was so much taller than Sharly, for Sharly might have lent her some elegant garments. There was more difference than usual between the

wardrobes of the two sisters this year — Helen having firmly refused to have anything new, as soon as she began to see the anxious look in her father's face, and understood that it meant business losses.

"Just see this elegant lace, Di Cary. Aunt Marian gave it to me after that last lecture. She is so good and kind, and never has the least idea of hurting my feelings; indeed, I suppose she really is perfect."

"At any rate, Helen, the lace is perfect, and I'm glad you've got one nice thing."

"Now, never you mind, Di; just wait till I make my fortune, and then I'll have the loveliest clothes!"

"No, you won't; not till all the children are supplied. Don't you suppose I know what you'll do with your money, Helen Asbury? Sharly will have more of it than you will — you see if she doesn't."

"Diantha Cary—*ophyllus!* This isn't the first time you've hinted that that blessed child is selfish. Take it right back, or I won't go with you one step."

"On my bended knees I take it back," cried Di, throwing herself into a tragic attitude on the floor; "and she's the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life. There, will that do?"

Something occurred before the trio left Quinnebasset, which was both a pleasure and a pain. Dr. Willard had always said it was the height of his ambition to own Jubilee Hill, the handsomest site in town; and hearing that it was for sale, he made a liberal offer, which Mr. Asbury accepted. Why not? It was of no use keeping the place, without the remotest prospect of living on it again. Dr. Willard would proceed at once to build, and would sell the house he now oc-

cupied on the most reasonable terms — or rather Dr. Prescott would sell it, for it belonged to him; a story and a half cottage in a very pleasant part of the village, on low land overlooking the river.

Thus there was good hope that the Asburys would be able to leave the Pages before many months. They tried to be thankful; but the Prescott house had low ceilings, small rooms, and none of the modern improvements. It did seem hard to accept it in place of their beautiful, spacious, lost home.

Sharly poured out her soul in tears. It is an easy habit to form, this of crying and lamenting, without troubling ourselves to think what effect it will have on our friends.

Helen was afraid of herself, and kept still. Being naturally rebellious, she dared not speak of the family woes except in the lightest manner; for, as she said to Di, —

"If I should once let myself down, where should I go to?"

She knew very well she should be homesick at New York; but she went off bravely, smiling through her tears.

"Remember, you are all three to drink tea with us at the 'Intervale Cottage,' on the first of next July," said Mr. Asbury, as they entered the stage.

"Intervale Cottage" was the name they had already given the new home.

"How little we know what may happen before another July," sighed Mrs Page, going into the house to take her after-breakfast medicine, while Vic threw an old shoe after the stage for good luck. Unfortu-

nately, Van was just behind with another shoe — a mate to the first one — and the pair met in the middle of the road.

"That's a bad sign; seems if!" ejaculated Ozem, scratching his head.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STUDIO LIFE.

"'HEAR the sledges with the bells, silver bells.' They make me just wild to be sleighing," said Diantha Cary, as she and Helen sat in their own private boudoir, copying a picture. "They've had a six-inch storm at Quinnebasset," said Helen, gazing thoughtfully out of the window.

"Always Quinnebasset, Quinnebasset," said Di; "don't you more than half think she's homesick, Mr. Lynde?"

Mr. Lynde had a large studio, which was his proper working-place, out of which this pleasant den opened; but he had several easels, supporting half-finished pictures, and often of a morning sat here with the girls, painting a marine view. At such times he was always ready to answer questions relating to their work, but never encouraged general conversation. Di, however, was an impulsive, social creature, and not feeling any very absorbing interest in art, she was apt to forget herself, and break forth in little exclamations and bits of talk.

"I should be sorry to think our Helen is homesick," said Mr. Lynde, suspending his brush a moment, and casting a searching glance at her face. The words and

look had all the force of a direct question, and Helen felt obliged to answer, "O, no sir, — not now."

"Then you have been?" cried Di, "and never let us know."

"Only a very little now and then," said Helen, with averted face. "Everybody is so good and kind to me that I'm ashamed to confess it, and you weren't fair to make me."

Di wheeled about in a flutter, —

"I always knew it was constitutional, but I thought you'd outgrown it, Helen. You remember what you were doing when I first saw you, I suppose?"

"Hush, Di; do hush!"

"She was kissing a rag baby, Mr. Lynde, and calling it all the names of the family, one after another."

"Now Di!"

"Yes, you were, and crying over it. You sat on the bed in our room at Mrs. Phelps's boarding-school; and I wasn't going to let you know I was there, but I did hate Boston so that I began to cry myself. And that was the beginning of our friendship, Mr. Lynde."

"No," said Helen, looking ashamed, "she had a paper of lemon-drops, and that was the beginning of it."

How could Di laugh about their sacred friendship before a third person?

"And you ought to have seen that doll, Mr. Lynde! If it hadn't been for the 'pumple feet,' it was equal to any statue. She made it herself, and the girls thought she was a second Harriet Hosmer, when I carried it round for a show."

"Yes, after you stole it. You have always been a great trial to me, Di Cary! You can't be trusted to keep the least thing to yourself."

"Of course not. Didn't I tell you, in the first place, I never kept a secret in my life; but you took me for better for worse, and it's too late now to complain."

"It's very provoking," said Helen, as if thinking aloud; "but the people you like to confide in are the very ones that run and tell. Now, there's mother — but no, mother isn't as bad as Di; she does keep some things to herself."

For Helen remembered just then Mrs. Asbury's strict secrecy in regard to cousin Morris's affairs. Would that mystery ever be brought to light? Was the man still haunted by it? she queried, peeping up at him through her eyelashes. He looked neither sad nor happy, but entirely absorbed in his painting. Probably he had not heard a word of this talk: she hoped not.

"Listen, listen! she compares me to her mamma," cried the vivacious Di, rising and brandishing her palette like a flag. Mr. Lynde smiled. Di was a favorite with him as with everybody else, for in spite of her voluble tongue, she had a fine mind, and the very sweetest temper in the world.

"Dear, dear! there you both sit, painting away till it seems as if I should fly. I think art is hungry work; what do you think, Miss Asbury?"

"I think 'art is long,' Miss Cary, and you'd better keep at it."

"Well, I would, only now I've splashed some Paris green right into my sky. Dear, dear! I meant to drop it in the grass. Ah, here comes my only brother! How well I know that elephantine tread!"

Enter Frank Cary, a fashionable youth, who was reading Blackstone at odd times, when he could not possibly avoid it.

"Good morning, Mr. Lynde; good morning, girls. Allow me to look over your shoulder, Helen? Well, upon my word, your picture is growing. It really has a sort of finish about it very different now from Di's."

Finish! She considered it scarcely begun.

"Your trees are trees, you know, but Di's look like corn brooms the soft side up."

"Fie, Sir Critic, get thee to thy law books!" said Di, blushing at this brotherly frankness. "Mr. Lynde has kept me making 'nonsense-leaves and Hardingesques, just for practice, and this is my very first real picture: so you're not fair at all."

"Did you notice the sign over our door?" asked Helen.

"O, yes; a very neat thing."

It was "Miss Cary and Miss Asbury," in plain gilt letters.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said Di, recovering her good humor, "I'm going to put this motto under my name, — 'I must have fame or die.'"

Frank laughed at that, a real rollicking, boyish laugh in which all the rest joined.

"Now I suppose you think it is an original idea with me, but it isn't, though it's bright enough to be original. Mr. Lynde actually saw a young man in Rome who had that motto painted over his studio door, 'I must have fame or die.'"

"'Pon honor, Mr. Lynde?"

"Certainly; I knew him very well. It was some time ago, and I suppose he is dead now, for he hasn't become famous, poor fellow."

"There, Frank, do run away! I'm going to turn my

picture wrong side up, and then the sky will be an ocean, and that little green spot in it will be an island, don't you see? But 'tisn't fair for you to look at Helen's work, and then come and make fun of mine. She's a genius — and I am not!"

"Is Helen a genius, Mr. Lynde?" asked Frank, looking interested.

"Genius is a troublesome word, Mr. Cary. Michael Angelo settles it by saying it is 'eternal patience,' and if it is, why, then I should say Helen possesses it."

Mr. Lynde said this with an approving glance, which made Helen happy for weeks afterwards. She did not feel quite as familiar with her teacher now as in the old days when they had both spent the summer out of doors at Quinnebasset; for then he had nothing to do but lie on the grass and talk. Now his brain and hands were so busy that he found little time for conversation, and she hardly knew whether she were really acquainted with him or not. She had ceased to call him cousin Morris, but that was because the name belonged to him only at Quinnebasset, and was out of place here.

"Well, I always said Helen would be a marked woman one of these days," said Frank, admiringly.

"She distinguished herself yesterday," said Di; "we must tell Mr. Lynde of that. You know how nervous papa is? Well, and when he goes to sleep in church we never dare touch him; but Helen didn't know it, and yesterday, just as he dozed off, she gave him just the slightest little pat, no heavier than a raindrop, and he screamed right out in meeting! positively screamed."

"Yes," said Frank, "and it made such a sensation

that I expected our names would appear in this morning's Herald."

This anecdote was pathetic rather than amusing, if Mr. Cary's children had only known it. He was an overworked merchant, who schemed all day in his counting-room, and schemed all the evening over his newspaper; and there was a whisper in the air, that if he did not stop soon, softening of the brain might be impending.

"Come, girls," said Frank, recollecting his errand, "don't you want to go to ride in the Park?"

An ecstatic little cry from Diantha; a broad smile from Helen.

"But if you'll only wait till after lunch."

"Well, Salloway can't go this afternoon, for there's a case coming off at court that he has to attend to."

It was well that no one happened to be looking at Di, for a soft color spread over her cheek, more cleverly blended than anything her brush would ever achieve, and all done in a flash.

"Mr. Salloway? You didn't mention him before. If this is the way he asks young ladies to ride, I think he's rather unceremonious."

"Well, you didn't want him up here, of course, and I made him understand that. It's no place for fellows to come and be hanging round," said the thoughtful brother; "it's best to nip that sort of thing in the bud. I'll tell him you'll go, shall I, girls?"

Helen looked at Mr. Lynde. She wanted his opinion, but dared not ask it. It seemed to her that some of the young men she met at Mr. Cary's would hardly be very cordially welcomed in her father's parlor, but New

York was so unlike Quinnebasset that she did not feel sure of anything. Mr. and Mrs. Cary had their own set of friends, and their children had theirs, with scarcely any question or even comment. Mr. Cary took no interest in drawing-room matters, and his wife was a lovely, vacillating little woman, trying her best to serve both God and mammon, and beginning already to look up to her daughter, whose mind she instinctively felt was stronger than her own.

Thus, to Helen's surprise, it really happened that Di's gentlemen friends were half of them chance acquaintances of Frank's, 'in society,' to be sure, but unknown to Mr. and Mrs. Cary. Reared in a country town, Helen held the old-fashioned idea that it is best to know who are the fathers and mothers of one's associates. She liked Mr. Salloway best of any of the young men she had seen, yet even he was not to her taste; and she did not think her father would fancy him either. She had not been asked to ride this winter by any young man but Frank, and she did wish Mr. Lynde would give some sign, if it were only the lifting of an eyebrow, to let her know whether he approved of Mr. Salloway.

I have kept her apparently looking at him a long while, but in fact it was not two seconds, and I am compelled to say, that while Mr. Lynde was fully conscious of the beseeching glance,— having a double pair of eyes always in use,— he paid no heed, but kept on painting with supreme indifference.

At last Helen spoke timidly, —

"Mr. Lynde, shall I go? Shall I run away from my painting?"

He looked up then, smiling, —

"You are altogether too industrious, Helen. Don't mind going — that is, leaving your work."

That was an unsatisfactory answer. If she had been alone with him, she would have made him say more. She would have explained to him that people and things were all strange to her here in the city, and Mr. and Mrs. Cary did not prove as good guardians for the little country girl as he seemed to suppose.

"Of course you'll go," said Frank. "Helen is growing pale every day with the smell of these paints."

"'O, call her fair, not pale,'" struck in Di, cleaning her palette in high spirits.

"Well, we'll be round with the horses at sharp twelve."

"Not at the studio?"

"No; unless you want to ride in your sleeved aprons," said Frank, departing. "Remember, sharp twelve."

CHAPTER XIX.

A STUDIO CHAT.

"Manhood with a female eye."

"WHAT, Lynde, still harping on my daughter? Give it up as hopeless, and let it go."

"Never while I live!" was the fervent response.

Helen, sitting alone in the boudoir, had been conscious of an indistinct hum of voices in the studio; but knew now that Mr. Lynde and his friend Mr. Howe were talking together, and it flashed across her instantly that the conversation was in reference to that mystery which had been hanging over cousin Morris for years, and which she was so eager to unravel. She could not have told why, but hardly a day passed that she did not rack her brains over that problem. Now, a little more, and it would be unravelled. She did not deliberately intend to listen; she would not have left her chair and gone to the keyhole; but if they spoke so loud that she could not help hearing where she sat, whose fault was it but their own?

"I tell you, Lynde, you are chasing a phantom. It won't do for us to set our hearts on what we can't get — do you know it?"

Mr. Lynde laughed a short, dry laugh.

"Behold, you know not anything," said he, misquot-

ing Tennyson in a tone which Helen thought expressed annoyance.

"Yes, I do; I know and appreciate the whole thing," returned his friend; "but I can tell you just how I should take it: I should give it up, and settle down comfortably. What's the use for a young man like you —"

Mr. Lynde cleared his throat in a warning manner, whereupon Mr. Howe dropped his voice, and said, in a stage whisper, —

"What! doesn't your cousin know?"

That was the last Helen heard. They seemed to move farther away from the door, and whether the conference went on or not, the mystery remained a mystery still to her. Was it a hopeless love? Did the lady live at the South? Had some cruel parent or guardian forbidden their meeting? and was Morris determined to hope against hope? Why should she care? What right had she to care? He evidently meant she should not know even that there was a secret at all. What an Eve-ish curiosity she did have, and how she hated herself for it! She tried to fix her mind on a bit of smooth blue river, which required a firm, even stroke of the brush.

Presently Mr. Howe left, and Mr. Lynde came into the boudoir.

"Why, where is Di?"

"She has an engagement with her dressmaker."

Mr. Lynde seated himself before his easel, and began to paint. He was extremely industrious, giving his full strength to each task before him; but while the colors were drying on one picture, he could turn to another

with fresh zeal. He had none of that feverish unrest and hurry of spirits which is the bane of so many artists and writers; he had learned self-control by hard experience.

"Well, Helen, what is it?"

Without appearing to raise his eyes from his work, he saw that she looked dull and unhappy.

"What is what?"

"The shadow on your face? Are you still a little homesick?"

"I want to see papa. I am afraid, by what they write, that he doesn't gain much."

Mr. Lynde had the same fear.

"Well, Helen, you are going to him in July."

"And you, too. You and Diantha and I are to drink tea at Intervale Cottage — don't you remember? Vic is beginning to plan what they'll get for supper: sugared waffles for one thing."

"O, but I never promised," said Mr. Lynde; "and I fear it would be quite impossible for me to go as early as the first of July. I have made other arrangements this morning with Mr. Howe."

"I'm so sorry," said Helen; and could not help fancying the "other arrangements" had something to do with the mysterious hope which he "never would give up while he lived."

"Was your letter sadder than usual this morning, Helen?"

"O, no; but rather short. They were moving, and it is all mud and snow. Why, the gate posts are only beginning to peep up through the snow, like stoppers out of bottles. Sharly said, 'Tell that to Mr. ——.'

She always indicates your name with a dash, to save work."

Mr. Lynde shrugged his shoulders.

"Snow in April? Why, to-day is the third. Is Quinnebasset moving up towards the North Pole?"

"And mamma wrote," said Helen, "that Mrs. Page had just been in to see them in the new house. Father was rather poorly — and what do you think her greeting was? 'How do you find yourself to-day, cousin William? I just called to see old Mrs. Davenport, and *she* is very low.'"

"She is a cheerful visitor," said Mr. Lynde, smiling.

"Yes; I think her name ought to be Dolorosa."

"Helen, wouldn't it be a good idea for your father to take a journey? I have suggested it in every letter I've written to your mother, but she always says he is not in the mood."

Helen's mouth drooped a little.

"Papa is rather discouraged, I think. He used to have so much life and energy; and now I don't see what can have become of it all."

"It is a very common thing for invalids to feel depressed," said Mr. Lynde; and then, to change the current of her thoughts, he asked, "Now I want you to tell me if you mean to come back to New York next fall?"

"Yes. I shall be very glad — if you are willing."

"As I certainly am; you can't doubt that."

"I want to come; for only think, you've made me earn four hundred dollars already."

"Made you?"

"Certainly. Didn't you touch and retouch, and rub

out and paint over those two pictures till they weren't mine at all? O, I know just how kind you are, and I thank you all the time in my thoughts."

"Helen, you are such a grateful soul that it is a pleasure to do anything for you. But you don't really like living at New York? — now confess it."

"I like earning money."

"Mercenary girl! If you could have either fame or money, which should you choose?"

"O — money!"

"How shocking! Still, as you want it for your friends, and not for yourself, I'll forgive you. But, Helen, you haven't told me yet how you like New York."

She had been in the city seven months, and in all that time Mr. Lynde had scarcely seen her, except in Di's presence. He had spared no pains in teaching her; but what she did, and where she went, when away from the studio, he had never inquired, thinking, "That is Mrs. Cary's affair, not mine." But a few remarks lately from Mr. Howe had opened his eyes to the fact that Mrs. Cary took very little responsibility of the girls, and he began to think he had been treating Helen with neglect.

"How do I like New York? Not at all. The noise is dreadful, but I'd rather hear it than listen to the talk of the people. I do think everybody here is *so* stupid, cousin Morris."

"Thanks for the 'cousin Morris;' it is refreshing to hear it once more, though I feel that I don't deserve it. I have been so busy, so engrossed, that I have not stopped to think how affairs were going with you; I

have left you to the Carys, and the Carys, it seems, have left you to yourself."

"O, no, I haven't been neglected for a moment, cousin Morris; everybody has been wonderfully kind."

"I mean, Helen, that no one has a proper oversight of you; and some of the people you meet at the Carys are not desirable acquaintances."

"I don't like any of them — I detest New York society!" cried Helen, passionately, giving vent at last to her strong feeling. "I don't take the least comfort with anybody but Di and Frank — and you."

"I wish you had told me this before, though I ought to have found it out for myself. But, Helen, you mustn't think the people you meet comprise the best part of New York society."

"O, I know better than that. I know there are men and women I should like, for I have had glimpses of them here at the studio; but they are out of my reach, you know," said Helen, trying to speak brightly, for she would not have Morris think she meant to complain.

"They are not out of your reach. I can easily bring it about that they shall wish to know you. My dear cousin," said he, rising impetuously, and going over to her, "I have kept you out of sight, thinking the Carys sufficed for you, and you would not wish for other society. Tell me you forgive me, and I will begin this very day to make friends for you. Henceforth I will consider you my especial care."

Helen, a little surprised, looked up with another glow of gratitude, which broke into a delighted smile. Why did Mr. Lynde drop her hand almost abruptly, walk slowly back to his easel, and keep silence for a full

minute? Had he made the promise against his better judgment? Was there some secret reason, only half known to himself, why he had kept a little aloof from Helen ever since she came to New York?

I am not writing his story, but hers. I will merely say that a shrewd observer might have surmised, by the intent expression of his eye, that he was forecasting the future, and saw something there which perplexed him; still, he may have been only mixing colors.

How kind he was, Helen thought. She should have more of his society after this, and make the acquaintance of some of his friends, whose name was legion; and they were among the best people, too, for "a man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men." She knew she should like them, and they surely would not talk all the time about theatres and fashions; they would talk of books, and art, and things that are worth hearing.

"And Di," said Helen, timidly, "she would like to know your sort of people, too."

Helen could not quite enjoy anything from which her friend would be excluded.

"O, yes, Di, by all means."

"I don't think there's a soul in her set she cares much for except Mr. Salloway," added Helen; "and I, for my part, don't like him. He is always questioning me about my 'grounds of belief,' and calls Christ a reformer, and immortality a beautiful dream."

"Poor fellow! he has no right to talk to you so. Well, Helen, the people you are to know after this believe devoutly in God and the vast forever. You will hear no sceptical speeches from them. You remem-

ber that brown-eyed young man who comes here so often?"

"O, yes — Mr. Howe. You introduced him to us the other day."

"Well, he is a delightful man, and would like to know you; but do you believe I had the coolness to tell him last winter that you were too busy to make acquaintances outside your own circle? You know you did say that, when I asked if I should present Mr. Balkham."

"Yes; but I didn't think of really being acquainted with these people, cousin Morris. I thought they only wanted to come in and look at my work, and criticise it."

"That was your idea, was it? — Seems to me you and I are having an unusually long chat this morning. Do you know that your friend Di, though a very charming young lady, does monopolize the conversation? I'd like to have you tell me what it was you said the other day about composing pictures — do you want to do it?"

"O, of course I'm not advanced enough yet; but I do get tired of copying."

"Do you ever see any pictures in your mind?"

"Yes, indeed — scores of them."

"Suppose you paint one for me in words."

"Well, I see a winter sunset in Quinnebasset, late in the season. I'll tell you first how the ground looks. There are patches of snow, and bits of half-frozen grass, with here and there a mullein-stalk curled up in its woolly coat against the cold."

"I see it so far, Helen. Go on."

"It's by the bank of the river. The river is a sheet

of smooth, pearl-white ice, and reflects the trunks of the trees just like a mirror; it is surprising how clear and distinct they look. The sun is setting, and the houses on both banks have ruby-red windows, and so there are ruby-red windows down below; and, indeed, half the ice is in a perfect blaze of glory."

"You dazzle me, Helen."

"O, I forgot to say there is a white vapor rising like the spirit of the snow, and it softens everything. In other words, a fog."

"Ah, that is lovely!"

"Yes; but I'm keeping the best for the last. Sharly is in the very heart of the picture, skating and waving her arms; it looks as if she were beckoning to the water spirits down under the ice."

"That will do. Graceful Sharly in the foreground: that completes the picture, Helen."

"Yes, if you could see her move. That is what tries me with pictures, Morris — they have to be so still. After you paint a cloud, don't you want to blow it a little with your breath, just to make it move?"

"Yes; and when I paint a face I am dissatisfied because the expression is fixed. For instance, Helen, if I could only paint the thought that is growing in your face now as you look up at me!"

"Paint a growing thought! How queer!"

"Well, here you are, talking like a couple of magpies," cried Di, rushing in breathless. "Who lectured me yesterday morning, Helen Asbury, upon the importance of keeping one's mouth shut in a studio?"

CHAPTER XX.

A TELEGRAM.

"It is very good for strength
To know that some one needs you to be strong."

IN the next few months Helen's opinion of New York underwent an entire change. She and Di made the discovery that there were people in the city as single-minded as themselves, but of far more culture; men and women who each had some special thing to do, and could not stop to give more than a passing glance at the fashions; and these people did, in their abundant charity, condescend to reach out warm hands of friendship to our humble little artists. Life is worth so much more when it is lived among 'real folks,' who are in earnest about something, and whose hearts are big enough to take us right in!

"I do think they are the brightest, free-and-easiest, nicest people! They make you feel as if you couldn't waste a minute, and yet must enjoy every minute, for time is short, and there's so much to do," said Di, working away at a tree with 'real leaves;' "and somehow I've changed my opinion about Mr. Lynde since I've known Mr. Howe and Mr. Balkham."

"Changed your opinion?"

"Yes. I always thought he was a hard master, but now I don't: he is just right."

Mr. Lynde was averse to flattery. He was a severe critic of his own work, and made it a point to find every possible fault with that of the girls.

"If one is too easily satisfied," he said, "there is an end of improvement. We never strive for what we think we have already attained."

Di had always longed for a little praise. Why, what did the man expect of her? Hadn't she told him all she wanted was to learn to paint pictures good enough for the parlor? She didn't care for "art power," or "art excellence:" she wished he would just let her jog along in her own way. Now she was beginning to agree with Helen, that the more criticism she had the better.

They were right in the heart of June by this time, and longing for the country. In order to make sure of not disappointing Mr. Asbury, Di and Helen were to leave New York on the twenty-ninth of June.

On the twentieth, Di and her brother Frank took an excursion to Ingleside; and as Helen and Mr. Lynde were sitting painting in the boudoir, a despatch was brought in for Helen. Business men do not mind telegrams any more than "How d'ye do's" in crossing the street; but to womankind they are thunderbolts of terror. Helen tore open the envelope with trembling haste, and read, —

"Father worse; failing fast; come at once. Charlotte D. Asbury."

At first she wondered vaguely who Charlotte D. Asbury could be; then she tossed the paper at Mr. Lynde's feet, and rushed to the window. Her surprise was as great as if her father had been well up to this hour. She

had expected to find him grown older and frailer—she was prepared for that; but this! what did it mean but the one thing that ends all? She hardly knew where she was till some one touched her shoulder, and pressed a glass of water to her lips. Then she looked round, her mind clear again.

"How soon can I go?"

"The next train leaves at three."

She forgot that Di was out of town, and the journey must be made alone; but Mr. Lynde had thought of it, and rapidly changed his plans to meet the emergency.

"I shall go with you," said he, as quietly as if he had intended it from the beginning.

"You? O, if you could!"

For she remembered he had just been telling her that every hour had its special work up to the third of July. But waiving all that, he moved about the room, beginning already to turn the pictures toward the walls, put the portfolios in brackets, and set everything in proper order for leaving.

Helen felt thankful more than once during the journey that Morris was with her rather than Di, for he was just like her mother in the soothing effect of his presence. It is a rare endowment, this of knowing the right thing to say, or not to say, to a soul in affliction; it is a thrice blessed gift from the Father of love.

Arriving at Poonoosac the next afternoon, they took the stage for Quinnebasset. Helen had been longing to meet some one from home who could tell her of her father; and as if in mocking answer to the poor child's wishes, the first person she saw in the stage was Miss O'Neil, her wiglet awry, and her voice at a fine scold-

ing pitch. Her "particular friends" at Poonoosac had overwhelmed her with presents in the housekeeping line, and she did not know where to bestow them on account of the crush of passengers.

"Just take this hind quarter of fore lamb, won't you, and hold it for me?" cried she to Mr. Lynde, and then gave him and Helen her little finger to shake, through the handle of a maple-sirup can.

"Well, Helen Dillingham, so you are really going home at last, and high time, I should think."

"When did you hear from father, Miss O'Neil?"

"Hear from him? I saw him yesterday noon. But you won't get there in season with this slow stage. Why didn't you come a month ago?"

"How did he look, Miss O'Neil? What did the doctor say? Pray tell me everything you know."

"Why, I know the whole story, child, and I've been explaining it to my particular friend, Dr. Rideout of Poonoosac, and he has given me a tin pail of mineral water; I've got it under the seat here, with —"

"Where was he, Miss O'Neil? How did he look?"

"Helen, I never allowed you to interrupt when you went to my school! This tin pail has got a kind of a stopper to it — and came out of a spring; it is a mineral and has been dissected, and Dr. Rideout thinks may cure him; and so do I, for I can remember when cold water was discovered."

The passengers, all strangers, were amused, but looked as if their sympathies were enlisted for Helen.

"Miss O'Neil," said Mr. Lynde, authoritatively, "what we want to know is, where and in what condition did you find Mr. Asbury yesterday noon?"

"Well, he was in the chamber over the sitting-room, — Helen broke in before I could explain it, — it's the chamber where Dr. Prescott used to sleep, with an open fireplace, and the paint is green; it is a pretty pearl-color, but too green; he ought not to have gone in yet. I told them to wait and let Helen paint it, for she was learning how; but it don't make much difference, as I know of, when folks are on their death-beds. 'Life is the time to serve the Lord' —"

"*O!* Miss Neil," cried Helen.

"We want the particulars, if you please," said Mr. Lynde, sternly. "Was Mr. Asbury sitting up or lying down?"

"Why, they had lifted him on to the bed. It is a mattress, though, and I told his wife I hope if ever *I* die, it will be on a feather bed."

Helen touched Mr. Lynde's arm, to signify that he need not ask any more questions. She could not bear the truth garbled in this way, for her mind was already in a whirl with the vain attempt to get at the facts.

"You see," continued the bird-witted old lady, "he can't open his eyes; he is in what they call a *catamouse* state."

Some of the passengers smiled, and no wonder; but Mr. Lynde looked grave, for he thought at once that *catamouse* must be an insane attempt at the word *comatose*, as used by Dr. Prescott. Well, they would soon know.

When the stage reached the old Prescott house, the four sisters all ran out to the gate, and clung about Helen and Morris with sobs and broken words of wel-

come. Papa went to sleep yesterday morning on the sofa, and nothing could rouse him, they said. The doctor and Silas Hackett had lifted him upon the bed, but his sleep only seemed to grow deeper and deeper.

Mrs. Asbury met Helen and Morris at the chamber door, and received them into her arms, weeping silently.

"Don't you think, mother, if I go to him and whisper in his ear, and take his hand, — *don't* you think he will know me?"

Alas, no! Her pleading cry fell on dull ears; her hand met no answering pressure. Never in all her life before had her father failed to greet her with a smile.

"O, father, do know me, please know me."

"It is of no use, Helen, he will never speak again," said aunt Marian, who stood with uncle Charles by the bedside. Helen knew it all, but it seemed dreadful to hear it put in words, and she cried out under the pressure of her grief, "What does God mean? O, it does seem cruel!"

Uncle Charles knew that the girl was hardly responsible, and he put his arm around her gently, and would have tried to soothe her; but aunt Marian, who had never, since she began a Christian life, uttered one murmuring word against Providence, was horrified, and could not let Helen's impiety go unrebuked.

"It is none of our business, Helen, why God afflicts us," said this really excellent woman; "all we have to do is to bear it."

Now Mrs. Hinsdale's heart was really throbbing with sympathy for her niece; she only meant to remind her of the sovereignty of God; but O, how unlike the way in which uncle Charles would have done it!

Helen rushed out of the room, and Mr. Lynde followed her.

"Say something to me, Morris," said she, confronting him in the little entry down stairs. "It is my father that lies there. He doesn't speak to me; he never will speak again. I can't bear it, — O, I *can't* bear it!"

Her wild eyes, her rebellious manner, recalled the girl he had met at Mrs. Satterlee's party. He knew it was aunt Marian's harshness that had driven her frantic; still he must also be stern — it was the only way just now.

"Open the door, Morris: I can't breathe."

"Helen," said he, leading her down the short path to the gate, "think of your sisters, how they have longed for your coming. Control yourself; you can do it."

She struck her hand against the top rail of the fence so roughly, that is must have hurt her

"There, it is over now. I can go back, for I will — and aunt Marian may talk to me as she likes."

"That is a good girl."

But she still lingered, looking off at the quiet river and the sweet evening sky, scarcely seeing anything, only feeling that all Nature was too lovely to be endured. The very odor of the willows and the fresh turf oppressed her almost with a feeling of pain.

"Where *is* father? He is not here; he is not gone."

"Hovering between the two worlds."

"O, Morris, the other world is so still; not a word or a sign," said she, straining her eyes as if she would look into infinity. "Mother went there, so long, so long ago — how can I spare father to go there too?"

"Be still, and know that I am God," was Mr. Lynde's response, in a low voice, with uplifted head.

"She tossed the paper at Mr. Lynde's feet, and rushed to the window."
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That quieted her a little; but still the inevitable questions would rise. Who, that thinks, has not asked them in an hour like this?

"O, Morris, he doesn't know he is going. Only think of falling asleep, with mother and the girls in the room, — they never left him alone a minute, — and then waking — how it will startle him! — waking in a strange world! He will want us — he will want his friends — but instead of that he will see — pale spirits!"

"Helen, look yonder at those violet hills touching the sky."

"Yes; but why do you speak of that now?"

"Can you see where the hills end and the sky begins?"

"No."

"So it is with the earthly and the heavenly life. They will blend so perfectly, that when we reach the other world, we shall hardly be sure it is not the very world we have left."

"Why do you say so, Morris? how do you know?"

"I don't know: I only reason from analogy. It is not our Maker's way to startle us — as you express it. Everything moves into its place harmoniously here; why not there?"

"Why, really, now that seems reasonable," said Helen, in a tone of relief. "Precious father, I will try to give him up."

"He will be among dear friends, Helen, not pale spirits. It must be so, for the good God would not leave him comfortless."

"O, Morris, you have made me feel so much better!"

"I have told you nothing, my dear, only that God is good. That is the beginning and end of it all. We

don't know his ways; but can't we trust him that they must be right?"

"Yes, O yes! I have been so wicked! I mustn't ask questions; I must just have faith and be patient. Now I shall go back and be very brave; and won't you go too? Let us try to help mother bear up."

Aunt Marian had preached resignation, and so had Mr. Lynde; but Mr. Lynde had spoken in the gentle spirit of Christ, and the effect was so different! The bitterness was past with Helen — she would never know its like again — for though the bereavement was yet to come, our deepest anguish always lies in the first act of surrender.

She went back to the chamber with a look of strength in her face which was a great support to the children. They were always guided, more or less, by the eldest sister, and as she shed no tears, it was therefore wisest and best to be calm.

Helen had never felt so clearly the grand distinction between the "natural" and the "spiritual body" as now, while they all stood watching the mysterious far-away look steal over their father's face. It was more than the fluttering breath; it was the real man that was going away. When he had gone, Sharly threw herself upon the bed, calling "Papa! O, papa!" in an agony of grief; but Helen turned away: a finer instinct told her not to look there for her father, for he had risen.

CHAPTER XXI.

AUNT MARIAN'S WARNING.

"DID they take on much?" said Mrs. Applebee, of the Wix neighborhood, to Miss O'Neil.

"No; I never saw people so calm. The whole family staid up stairs, and Mr. Lynde, too; but when they passed out through the entry, I could see it was as much as ever Helen had been crying at all."

"Pretty actions at a funeral! Why, I always thought the Squire's folks set everything by him. Didn't they wear mourning?"

"No; not a scrid or a scrap."

"Well, of all things!"

"And Helen never even looked at the corpse," added Delia Liscom, who had driven Miss O'Neil as far as Mrs. Applebee's, and was going herself to Jonathan Wix's for butter. She could not forget or forgive the peculiar tenderness with which Mr. Lynde had supported Helen in coming down the stairs, and it was a little relief to her feelings to hear the ignorant Mrs. Applebee exclaim, —

"You don't say she didn't look at her father! Well, I should feel disagreeable if I thought my children would treat me that way after I'm gone!"

Delia knew better than to speak disparagingly of the

Asburys to any but her social inferiors. Among the better class of people the family stood above criticism. The fortitude with which Mrs. Asbury had borne her trials, and the sweet trust with which she accepted this last dispensation, had proved her to be a very high type of woman, and endeared her to the whole village. First poverty, then bereavement; but she was still trying to make the best of what was left her of life. Faith is the highest common-sense after all, but it is the rarest.

"Your aunt is so remarkable," said Delia to Mr. Lynde, in her childlike way; "what does make her so different from other people?"

And he replied, briefly but significantly, —

"A pair of wings."

"And O, Mr. Lynde, hasn't our dear Helen grown pretty?"

"I should never think of calling her pretty," said he, smiling. Delia's heart bounded. She did not know that Mr. Lynde considered "pretty" a very meagre word for Helen.

"I'm sure the New York air, or something else, has cleared her complexion astonishingly, Mr. Lynde. Everybody thinks she's *so* pretty, you know! But why do you go away so soon? You will come back again — promise you will."

"In August," said he.

And Delia changed her plans, deciding to spend July at Harpswell, and stay at home in August.

It was a sad summer for Helen. She had been growing up to her father of late, and they would have had delightful times together, for she had intended to devote every moment to making him happy. She

longed for him more than she would have done if he had died two years ago. The house was strange, too; it was full of Prescott memories, which were nothing to her, of course; there was no Asbury look about it, either inside or out, except the furniture, and her eyes would wander longingly towards Jubilee Hill, though the new house which sat there was stranger still than Intervale Cottage.

But she could not give way to despondency, with her mother's high example before her. Sharly was half the time in tears; somebody must help keep mamma up, and, as usual, Helen forgot her own sorrow, and rose to the need of the hour; for it was as true of her now as ever, that she was "herself only on great occasions."

Her painting materials were all in New York, and she missed them. It was an effort to turn from art to needlework; but the children were in need of clothes, and she threw herself cheerfully into the vortex of dressmaking. It was Thurzy's "private opinion," freely expressed, that Sharly might drop her worsted work and help about the plain sewing; but Helen did not seem to think so. I am afraid Helen did spoil Sharly a little, and perhaps Mrs. Asbury did it, too; aunt Marian had always considered her "too easy" with all the children.

"Sharly never hurt herself working; but I'll tell you one thing," said Thurzy to Helen, with an air of pride, "she's a perfect *cokwette*. She's kind of subdued now; but you've no idea how she can flirt!"

To poor Theresa, who frankly confessed that she was "twenty-six years old and had never had an offer," the power of flirting seemed an amazing gift. Thurzy had given up all idea of the factory, and still clung to Mrs.

Asbury like Ruth to Naomi. "There might be better women," she said, "but she never had seen one yet."

The twins, now tall girls of fifteen, had attended the female academy for the past year, but Helen hoped some time to send them to boarding-school.

Baby Bel was shedding her front teeth, and Baby Boy had become such a dead weight of sweetness, that taking him in your arms was like lifting a firkin of sugar; but he had the same blue eyes, and Helen was glad his name was Morris.

After all, it was a delight to be at home with all these dear ones, despite the strange silence felt through all the noise — the silence of the one voice that would never speak again.

She had been feeling unusually oppressed one day, and sat by the window "weary and heart-tired," but sewing busily, when Morris's well-known step was heard in the hall. It seemed to her she had never been so glad of his coming before.

"We wanted you," said Bell; "where did you go to, and stay so long?"

"To New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and several other states, little cousin."

Everybody was talking at once; but Helen heard that evasive reply. It did not seem like Morris that he should not tell frankly all about his journey, and she was sure there was something to be concealed by the meaning glances which passed between him and her mother. Well, what did it matter to her?

"Helen," said Morris, "it is too late to sew. Won't you put by your needle and go to walk?"

She gladly threw on her light shawl and "snow-

flake," and went with him. They instinctively bent their steps towards the graveyard.

"I have only been here twice before," said she, as they entered the arched gateway, and walked through the tall grass and brambles; "but Sharly comes every day, and strews flowers on papa's grave."

A little vase, half imbedded in the sod, was filled now with geranium leaves, myrtles, and monthly roses.

"Morris," said Helen, in a low voice, "I would not confess it to everybody — but I don't like graveyards."

"Nor I."

"There, I'm glad you understand it! Mother and I both say father never seems so far away as when we are standing by this cold, white stone — what can be the reason?"

"Because the grave recalls the idea of decay, which we ought to forget, as the angels do."

"Yes, that must be it, for I have all sorts of mouldy thoughts when I am here, but they pass away when I get home. O, I want to ask you how you like this stone?"

"I like the shape, but not the size."

"But it had to be low; do you know there's a fashion in these things?"

"Yes, so I understand; but it seems rather absurd, when you consider that there's no particular fashion about dying."

Helen smiled — right by her father's grave she smiled; and aunt Marian, who was going by on her way to Mrs. Nason's, saw her, and thought her manner "eminently frivolous."

"There goes aunt Marian. I wish I could love her, for she is full of kindness. Now Sharly, the dear, sensitive child, was half frantic when the first rain fell on father's grave, and aunt Marian said she knew we should all feel so, and she came over to spend the evening with us, though it was pouring. But mother and I were not nervous in the least; we had not once thought of dear papa as lying out in the rain."

"I hope not; it is 'unthinkable,'" said Mr. Lynde, shuddering. "But some good Christians do suffer needless pain in that way, and I suppose it's a matter of temperament."

Helen wondered why her own temperament should be so much like her step-mother's and Mr. Lynde's, and so little like Sharly's. Fondly as she loved this favorite sister, she never found her half so congenial as Morris and mamma; she could not say her inmost thought to her without her exclaiming, "O, Helen, you're so very peculiar!"

"Your walk has freshened you very much, dear," said Mrs. Asbury, as she and Helen were having their usual chat that night at bedtime. "I hope you will go out more now, for you should not confine yourself so steadily."

"It was the talk that did me good, more than the walk," said Helen, brightly. "It was so beautiful coming home by the river, and listening to Morris. Why, mamma, he makes me feel that living is sublime. What if our friends do fade from our sight for a while? We are to have them again in the happy forever; and till then we can wait, for there's so much work to be done!"

Mrs. Asbury received a note from Mrs. Hinsdale next day, which read in this wise: —

"My dear Sister: I do not approve of Helen's returning to New York, unless she is engaged to your nephew; for there is danger of an unrequited attachment on one side or the other. Whether you see this or not, I do, and give you fair warning. You and I are too old to believe in Platonic love.

Sincerely yours, Marian Hinsdale."

I think Mrs. Hinsdale's advice was "eminently sensible." If there was any fatal reason why Helen and Morris ought not to care for each other, Mrs. Asbury, who knew her nephew's affairs, must have been aware of it, and ought to have interfered now. But she did not; she was always rather "easy." Was she stone blind? Or did she at her time of life still believe in Platonic love?

Helen returned to New York, and never heard of the "fair warning." I have no idea of following her through this second year, though from various causes it was the happiest she had ever known. For one thing she was allowed to paint original pictures, and with Mr. Lynde always near to suggest and criticise, bade fair to become an accomplished artist.

Her "studies," some of which were hung at the Academy of Design and other public places, attracted so much attention that she narrowly escaped becoming famous. But love of notoriety was not Helen's weakness. She shrank from notice, feeling really ashamed to receive credit for work she considered only half her own.

"Those pictures have all been retouched," said she

to a gentleman who admired them so much that he came to see her at the studio, and tried to engage her to go to St. Louis the next fall and teach drawing in his seminary.

But Mr. De Witt still insisted. Helen would have declined firmly, but the thought of the money was rather tempting, and his offer very liberal. Was she growing mercenary? She almost feared so.

"I will talk with my mother and sisters about it after I go home," said she, giving him her address, which he carefully preserved, together with several addresses of Mr. Lynde at three or four places, which he was to visit during the summer on sketching tours. Helen scarcely thought of Mr. De Witt again while she staid at New York; but the sequel showed that he did not forget her.

It was the fashion for people who came to the studio to praise Helen's pictures, but she had learned by this time that the world in general knows very little about art, and easily-won popularity is hardly worth having.

"It makes one shudder to be extolled by the newspapers," said Mr. Lynde, "for they often lie, and half of them don't know what true merit is. The life of an artist, Helen, must be one of rigorous duty and ceaseless endeavor. No matter what the public may say — he must never rest satisfied with anything but the consciousness of excellence. I am glad to see that your ambition is of the true sort," added he, with a smile.

"Our teacher is very proud of you," said Di, privately, without a shade of envy. "I mean proud every way, artistically and socially. Dear, dear! if I could only learn to hold my tongue, I might be considered 'superior' as well as you."

Di would never get beyond the servile task of copying; but she would not give up the cosy studio-life with her friend, for she was not happy; she needed work and needed Helen. It was their last year together, for Helen was to go home in June, let a skylight into the attic, and continue her painting there, while Di would set sail for Europe with her father the last week in May. His physicians had ordered him abroad, and his daughter needed the change almost as much as he. Her mother said she had worked too steadily, and pointed proudly to the handsome paintings on the parlor walls; but Mrs. Cary and her husband knew there was a deeper cause for the girl's pale cheeks and weary air. They had discovered rather late in the day that Arthur Salloway was an unprincipled, dissipated young man, quite unworthy their daughter's affections. It was an unfortunate mistake; but a year in Europe would blot it all out, for the grand tour can do almost everything — it can give rest to the weary, brains to the foolish, and the balm of healing to the wounded heart.

"But what shall I do when I come back next fall and find the boudoir empty?" said Mr. Lynde. "The memory of you girls will be locked into it, and will meet me here the moment I open the door. I shall have to write 'Ichabod' all over the room, and shut it up again."

He spoke with earnestness, and the girls were pleased at the thought of being missed — selfish creatures! Well, it was a satisfaction to know they had not been the annoyance to him that their friends had predicted.

CHAPTER XXII.

MOONSHINE.

"I am not old for nothing : I can tell
The weather-signs of love ; — you love this man."

SEVERAL strange things happened that summer, which affected at least three people, Helen, Sharly, and Thurzy. For one thing, a new circuit preacher came to supply every other Sunday the pulpit of the modest little brown meeting-house on Hackett Hill. Thurzy admired his zeal, though it was not according to knowledge, admired his muscular figure, broad shoulders, and red hair, and her admiration did not abate when she learned that he was a widower with one child. Thurzy pitied that child.

Mr. Bangs called often at Mrs. Asbury's, and talked to Miss Bumpus about the broken-up state of his house, but had the shrewdness not to mention that she had been recommended to him for a wife. That would have destroyed the charm in a moment ; for, strange as it may seem, the matter-of-fact woman had a spice of romance in her composition, and wanted to be loved for herself, big nose, homely mouth, and all, and would have lived single to the end of her days, rather than have married merely to fill a vacancy.

She had been going about the house one morning,

singing in a powerful voice the Celestial Railroad, and had got as far as,

> "If you'll repent and turn from sin,
> The train will stop and take you in,"

when Mrs. Asbury entered the kitchen.

> "The Bible is the engineer,"

sang Thurzy, wandering off the track, with a flurried look quite unusual to her.

"Mrs. Asbury," said she, as she slowly insinuated a custard pie into the oven, "I've got something on my mind, but I'm such a fool that I can't say it."

Mrs. Asbury knew that Thurzy had received very pointed attentions from Mr. Bangs, such as a box of steel pens, so she was prepared for the coming revelation.

"Ah, Thurzy, don't be afraid!"

> "I'm going home, to die no more,"

hummed Thurzy, flushing hotly.

> "'God's love 's the fire, 'tis true as steel.'

No, that ain't it neither, and I might as well out with it first as last. I'm thinking of going to the 'Roostick.'"

"To Aroostook County?" said Mrs. Asbury, affecting great dullness. "That is a wild country up there. It seems to me single women like you are wiser to keep within the limits of civilization."

"Now you needn't pretend to such ignorance, Mrs. Asbury. I ain't going alone. I've been fallen in love with, and you know it as well as I do."

"Ah, Thurzy, do you refer to Mr. Bangs? If you tell him plainly it is of no use, he won't insist. Men get over such fancies, you know."

"I ain't sure I want him to get over it," said Thurzy, with a foolish look at the rolling-pin. "I ain't sure but I'm as deep in the mud as he is in the mire."

"O, that alters the case; but why does Mr. Bangs strike off so far into the wilderness, Thurzy?"

"Well, they are short of gospel up there, and he was made for rough work, and the conference seems to so understand it. He was appointed to the 'Roostick last spring, but you know his child was so sick that they let him off a while, and then when *our* preacher, Mr. Pullen, died in a fit, he was needed here to supply the pulpit."

"How soon will he go to Aroostook?"

"Well, as soon as *I* can get ready," replied Thurzy, opening the oven-door, and taking an anxious look at the pie. "It's kind of ice-o-lated up there, and I ain't in any hurry to change my situation; but I suppose, considering they're dependent on lay preaching, I'd ought to go: and then again he thinks the child 'll be better off up there; it's so kind o' pindling.

> 'Come then, poor sinner, now's your time
> At any station on the line.'

I tell you it's a solemn thing to be a preacher's wife, Mrs. Asbury, and I'm afraid I ain't fit for it; but I mean to do the best I can, with the Lord's help; and seems as though he wouldn't have led me into this, if he hadn't meant to carry me through somehow."

It was a family affliction to think of losing Thurzy, and the children looked very sober, after the first excitement was over. But she wouldn't go away till some time next fall; and at any rate they should have Helen, they said, trying to console themselves — Helen, who

had come home to stay forever. And for a long while they should have cousin Morris, too. He had found several views of unusual beauty, which would keep him in Quinnebasset during the most of August and September, and he would come again for autumn sketches in November. The twins did not mean to be slangy, but they did consider it festive.

Helen's heart unconsciously grew lighter when she learned that he was not going away on any mysterious journey like last year's, and she happened to know that he had no very special correspondence, for the children brought his mail half the time, and he was quite in the habit of giving her his letters to read. Her unquiet feeling about that imaginary lady down south, had died, or was fast dying out. Life was fuller and sweeter to her than it had ever been before. She was not in the least aware of it, but she had that delicious sense of novelty and expectation which perhaps a rosebud feels when the west wind moves it to open its heart and become a rose.

I have called it a strange summer. There seemed to be a great deal of moonlight sprinkled over it, especially when Mr. Lynde was in Quinnebasset. He often took his cousins, and Margaret Hinsdale, and the two Willards, out rowing in his boat, the Evening Star. Helen had rowed in other boats a thousand times, but it was a remarkable moon that shimmered over the water just now, and it had a new charm for her which she dimly felt but could not define. Nothing could define that charm but music, and it was well that Mr. Lynde usually carried his mellow old flute in his pocket, for when he played it, the preciously sweet notes, echo-

ing across the water, did really interpret the meaning of the moon, Helen thought. The idea of making moonshine audible, of setting it to music, how Sharly would have laughed!

But what was Sharly herself thinking about in these long summer days, when she seemed strangely absent-minded, and spent so much time alone in her chamber? Helen had many a tender worry over her odd behavior. Could the child be in love? she thought, half frightened; for love is a mystery, and she did not want it to come into the family just yet. No. She was quite sure there was nothing of that kind troubling Sharly. Plenty of young men were fluttering about her, but she openly declared she liked none of them so well as cousin Morris; he was the most delightful person she had ever known. It amused Helen to see her pretty fondness for him, quite cousinly, of course, and the wrath of her adorers as she hung on his arm at walks and picnics. Cousins are a convenience sometimes, and Mr. Lynde smiled good-naturedly whenever he found himself standing between Sharly and one of her troublesome lovers. He liked her, and Helen was glad, for she had thought formerly that he did not quite appreciate her darling sister.

I am sure our heroine's state of mind must be clear enough by this time to the most careless reader, but how Mr. Lynde stands affected it is not so easy to discover. Helen was happy, she knew not why, but evidently cousin Morris was not happy. The old cloud came into his eyes more and more. What sent it there? What did it mean? His manner changed a little too. Helen was just as sure as ever that he liked to talk with

her better than with any one else, which was perfectly natural, for nobody understood him as she did; but lately he never showed her any marked attention without seeming directly afterwards to beg her pardon for it, as if he had forgotten himself. She did not understand this; still it did not trouble her in the least.

As Helen sat on the front door-stone with Mr. Lynde, listening to his reading of Robert Falconer, little Bel flew into the yard, all in white, with two letters in her mouth.

"Well, little carrier-pigeon, what have you brought this time?"

"It's for Helen, and one of them has 'P. M. please forward' on it," said the small messenger, pouting; "and Mr. Willard made me promise not to drop it, just as if I was a baby! That's the way he always talks."

As Helen took the letters, a shade of annoyance passed over her face.

"Why, it's from St. Louis again, and was misdirected to Kennebunk, care of Mr. Lynde, artist. The postmaster in that town must have known you, for he sent it to New York, and now it comes back to Quinnebasset, and the date inside is July 31st."

"I hope it is nothing of importance?" said Mr. Lynde.

"O, yes, it is; it is another letter from that Mr. De Witt, who wants me to teach painting in his seminary. How he does haunt me! I was just thinking it was too late to hear anything about that school, and I might roll it off my conscience."

"You don't mean the man who called on you at my studio in New York? I had no idea you thought seriously of accepting that offer."

"Yes, but I did, Morris. You forget the conversation. I couldn't give him a positive answer then, but told him I would talk with my friends at home, and decide in the course of the summer."

"O, Helen Asbury, Helen Asbury, you shan't go away!" exclaimed Hairbell, who was always crying before she was hurt.

"Please run into the house, little carrier-pigeon, and bring out a shawl for your sister; but mind you don't speak of the letter — there's a good girl! Now, Helen, let us talk together rationally. What does Mr. De Witt say?"

"Just listen, and see if it is not a temptation. 'We are now prepared to offer you a salary of six hundred dollars, with board, washing, lights, fuel, and all incidentals, together with your travelling expenses one way. The time required for teaching will be only two hours each day, Saturdays, of course, not included. Please let us hear from you at once, and if you decide to come, we will put you into communication with Mr. and Mrs. Pardee, two of our teachers who are spending the summer in Maine, and will take pleasure in escorting you to St. Louis. Our school year commences on the 3d day of September.' There now, only ten days' notice! Don't you suppose it's too late?"

"Of course it is; they have probably secured another teacher before this time."

"I do hope so."

"I thought you didn't want to go, Helen."

"No, indeed. You don't know how my heart clings to mother and the children. But let me look at my other letter, postmarked Portland. I don't know the writing."

To her chagrin it proved to be from Mr. Pardee, who said Mr. De Witt was still awaiting her answer, not knowing he had misdirected his letter, and the proposal he had made would stand open till the 26th of August. Mr. Pardee had just discovered Mr. De Witt's mistake, and hastened to acquaint Helen with the proposition, which he repeated minutely. Would she go? He assured her she could not fail to like the school and the principal; and as for the journey out, if she would accept the escort of himself and wife, they would gladly do their utmost to make her comfortable and happy. Would she despatch to Mr. De Witt as early as the 26th, also to the undersigned on the same day, that he might meet her at the Portland and Maine station prepared to continue her journey?

"There, Morris, you see it is clinched this time, and there is no excuse. I must make up my mind day after to-morrow. Now what shall I do?"

"You should not ask me, Helen. I am not a disinterested person."

Her face was upraised to his inquiringly.

"Why not?" she asked without reflecting, then turned away embarrassed, for his eyes had already answered her question in a language subtler than words.

"Because, Helen, if you are to go away from home at all, it naturally seems to me you may as well go to New York; but I am afraid I am too selfish to see the matter clearly, wanting you there so much. Have you ever thought how I shall miss you?"

"Well, you will be glad to miss my questions. Di and I have always been such chatterers."

"Helen!"

She could not help looking up at him again, but instantly withdrew her eyes, like one who is dazzled by gazing at the sun. Neither of them spoke for a full minute. Apparently Morris could not, would not, or dared not give expression to his thought, while Helen, who would gladly have broken the somewhat awkward silence, could think of nothing in the world to say.

"But perhaps this is my duty," faltered she, at last. "Maybe I could paint pictures when I wasn't teaching, and make more money than if I were at home."

Mr. Lynde started up suddenly, and began to pace the door-stone.

"Must that question always stand in the way? It isn't worthy to be considered."

Helen had wondered sometimes if Morris really did look upon her as a mercenary person, and if that was the reason he always showed such signs of impatience whenever she spoke of the necessity of earning money.

"Indeed, Morris, I ought to think of that part of it, now I've lost my gold spoon. Here are the twins growing up, and how are they to be educated?"

"Let me send them to school."

"You?" Helen laughed, and shook her head.

"I know what that means, you self-willed girl. It means that you are as firm in some absurd notions as the everlasting hills. You would not take a penny of mine if I should offer it on my knees."

"Of course not: you are not my cousin."

"No; but I am cousin to the twins — say brother — I am sure they seem as near as sisters."

Helen shook her head again, with her eyes on the ground.

"Thank you; but I thought we were to talk together rationally, and here you don't help me one bit. I'm going into the house to lay the matter before mother and the children, and take the sense of the meeting."

Mr. Lynde made an effort to detain her, but she glided away, and left him still pacing the door-stone, and looking at the sky. She laid the letters in her mother's lap, and while the rage of words was going on, retired into a shadowy corner, hearing nothing, and seeing only that golden and purple light in Morris's eyes.

"I always said they bordered on purple." She had forgotten for the moment all about the school, and when the children cried, "You shan't go; we'll bind you hand and foot," she wondered why so many little arms were round her neck, and where they thought she was in danger of going.

"Why, children dears, a body'd think it was a fixed thing; but it isn't by any means, and I shall take all day to-morrow to think it over in."

"No, you won't, Helen; you are going to Medumscott Pond to-morrow, and how can you do any thinking in a hay-rack party?"

"O, people can think in very queer places, Sharly. And you know I shan't go fishing with the rest of you, but just sit on the shore in a 'mournful muse,' so I can settle my mind while you are getting nibbles. Mother, you haven't spoken yet. What do you think I ought to do?"

"It does not seem to me a case of duty," replied Mrs. Asbury, in her clear, sweet tones; "I want you to

act for yourself, Helen. But isn't it your turn to stay at home this year?"

Sharly dropped her eyes at the words "your turn." It had never been quite plain to her that her mother perceived the wide difference between herself and Helen. Could she be so unreasonable as to expect her to take Helen's place in supporting the family?

"I feel like death about it," said Sharly, with eyes afloat. "It looks just as if I wasn't willing to do my part, when I'm perfectly willing, — you know I am, Helen, — if anybody would only tell me what to do!"

"I'm sure you work worsteds," cooed Vic, consolingly, "lots of worsteds."

"I was only thinking if I could earn this six hundred dollars, and lay it all aside, what a help it would be," said Helen, still a little bewildered, and adding to herself, "How good it was of him to propose educating the twins!"

"Yes, Helen, it would be a great help," said Mrs. Asbury; "but can't we manage very well without it? We need you at home, and you want to stay with us, I am sure."

Helen felt a prick of conscience. Yes, she wanted to stay at home, but not quite as much as she wanted to go to New York. What! Had it come to this, that she was growing indifferent to mother and the children? Why, it was nothing less than treason, and she would not harbor the feeling for a moment.

"Well," said Mr. Lynde, coming in and taking a chair beside Sharly, who immediately set him to holding worsteds, "have you settled the St. Louis affair?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Sharly, twinkling off a tear;

"do you suppose we'd let our Helen go off so far among strangers?"

"I should hope not," said Vic; "we'd live on bread and cheese before we'd allow it."

"If it turns on bread and cheese, the question must be laid on the table," said Helen, laughing. "Hark! hear that clock striking wrong again. It keeps about as good time as Captain Cuttle's watch."

"Morris, she is really talking seriously of this. Have you any advice to offer?"

"I would refer her to Mrs. Hinsdale, aunt Katharine."

The words were spoken gravely enough, but everybody laughed.

"Why is it," queried Sharly, "that we never do care about consulting aunt Marian?"

"Because she wants us to so much," replied Vic promptly, with her cheek against Helen's.

Mr. Lynde began to talk with Sharly about the fishing-party, and St. Louis was not mentioned again for the evening, much to Helen's relief, for she wanted to be left to herself to think. Only there was this disadvantage; her thoughts would spin round in an orbit of their own, and she could not get St. Louis into the middle.

"Strange I should see Morris so much, even with my eyes shut. His face has been in my work-basket all summer, in the books I have read, in the stars, in the fire. He must have what is called a strong personal magnetism: yet I do not remember that I was always thinking of him in those days when he first came to Quinnebasset."

Thus mused Helen in the corner, with her head on her hand. Beyond the present year she never thought of looking. All the bright, endless future was God's, and, somewhere, or somehow, Morris was in it as inevitably as the sun, moon, and stars.

"Helen, you are not asleep?" said Sharly, breaking off her worsted, and releasing Morris.

Helen roused herself, and looked a little confused.

"No, not asleep, but I believe I have been dreaming."

"'When we dream that we dream, we are near waking,'" said Mr. Lynde, coming up to her corner to bid her good night.

Helen thought only of his smile just then, but afterwards she recollected the words he had quoted:

"Yes, 'when we dream that we dream, we ARE near waking.'"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. PAGE'S WHIMSEY.

"He'll take suggestion, as a cat laps milk."—*Tempest.*

JUST here I believe we must leave Helen a few moments, and take a review of the Page family, as a little affair went on there two weeks ago which is destined to add to the strange events of the summer.

Ozem had been mowing his "aftermath" in the field back of the house, and, feeling tired and hungry about ten in the forenoon, concluded to go in and take a luncheon of doughnuts and sweetened water. Dorcas, who had contracted a bad cold, either by leaving the window open the width of a crack, or by using a handkerchief not sufficiently aired, had just been brought to her level — a bed. Ozem saw at once that she was in a "despair fit;" but the mental causes that had led to it were as dark a mystery to him as usual. That his putting salt in the brook could have anything to do with her approaching death, he never suspected; nor did Dorcas suspect it herself. He had said to her, on leaving the house that morning, —

"Dorkis, I've contrived a first-rate plan for giving salt to the cattle. I've dropped a bushel of rock salt into the brook in the meadow, and I calculate it will last them the rest of the summer."

"I've married a fool!" thought poor Dorcas. It was an old refrain which she had repeated to herself for more than twenty years, whenever Ozem displayed unusual vacuity of mind: "I've married a fool." This was the fountain-head of all her misery, for conscience would give her no peace after she had once begun that reiteration. "He is not to blame for being a fool. It was I who sinned against my own soul by marrying him. And, O Lord, to think I haven't even the consolation of leading him into the kingdom of heaven! Speak, and tell me what I shall do with him, or take me out of the world, for my trouble is greater than I can bear."

Then began a tearful reading of Job, followed invariably by a perusal of Dr. Warren's Household Physician, with her finger on her wildly-beating pulse.

"Come in here, Ozem," said she, faintly, as his figure appeared in the doorway, "for I'm dying; but don't you make tracks on my nice floor."

Ozem had become so accustomed to the arrival of the grim messenger, that he was not at all dismayed, but began to mix his premeditated refreshment of molasses and water, adding a little vinegar and ginger, and tasting it now and then to make sure the proportions were right. Not that he lacked feeling; but he had thus far found Death very obliging, and willing to postpone final accounts indefinitely. He rubbed his dusty boots with due deliberation, ate a twisted doughnut and a half, and then stole softly and mournfully to the bedside of the dying woman.

She raised herself on her elbow, and looked at him with tearful reproof.

"My dear, would I care to eat doughnuts if you hadn't half an hour to live?"

Ozem wiped his mouth on his checked handkerchief, and looked as if he knew he was a barbarian; but apologies wouldn't help the matter.

"It is reasonable to suppose," said Dorcas, catching her breath hoarsely, "that I can't hold out long. Take a towel, Ozem, and tie up my head in a hard knot. Pull tight, for there's a peculiar feeling in it such as I never had before."

Ozem pulled with a will.

"Now," said she, waving both hands tragically, "take this camphor in one hand and hold it to my right nostril, and this hartshorn in the other, and hold it to my left nostril. Perhaps both together will bring me to."

Ozem plied the bottles, now and then reversing the order, for better effect.

"You see, dear, I'm breathing with only one lung, and part of one nostril; but I have something on my mind, and must talk if I possibly can. O, Ozem, did you ever think our marriage was a mistake?"

Ozem sighed. There seemed to be no other mode of expression possible just then, as both hands were occupied, and his mouth filled with glass stoppers.

"My voice has a far-off, hollow sound," continued the sufferer. "You know I have had only one lung for years, and now the left one adheres to my side. It will soon be over, dear, and you'll forgive me if our marriage was a mistake."

Ozem unstopped his mouth, and replied, —

"Yes, ma'am."

In his more serious moments he never failed to add

"sir," or "ma'am," to his answers, and he often said "Yes, ma'am," to a toddling child.

"I've nearly worn you out with my ailings," said Dorcas, remorsefully; "I know I have, and that's been part of your cross."

"O, no, ma'am," said Ozem, "there's a good deal left of me yet. You've died so much nights that it has made it rather bad in haying and harvesting; but take it by the year together, I've generally got my sleep made up."

It may be that these honest remarks were not precisely what the dying wife had intended to call forth, for she added, on a higher key, and with suppressed feeling, —

"Yes, I'm what the villagers call 'spleeny,' and that has been your cross, Ozem; but what my cross has been, the Father of all only knows."

"That's true, ma'am," replied Mr. Page, gazing at her with his innocent blue eyes, which saw only a head bound up in a towel, a pair of withered, tear-wet cheeks, and a mouth trembling, he knew not why.

"I shouldn't so much mind dying," said Dorcas, laying a little gum camphor on her tongue, "if it wasn't for leaving you. You are not fit to take care of yourself, Ozem."

"O, don't you worry about that, now," said the widower expectant, in a soothing tone; "I shall get along first-rate."

"What! without me to plan for you? Haven't you always looked to me as the mainstay, and the headpiece, as you call it?" exclaimed Mrs. Page, so utterly astonished that she raised herself in bed, and

spoke without a trace of hoarseness. "Why, Ozem! you have no more idea of your own weakness than a baby! You would become an up-and-down fool if there wasn't somebody always trying to stir up your mind, and keep it going. If I die, you'll have to marry again."

"What! what! O, don't talk so!" said the bewildered husband. "You've got on a new tack, Dorkis; I've heard all the rest of your talk a hundred times over, but you never said anything before about another wife."

"I know it, dear; it is a subject I have always shrunk from mentioning; but it seems clear to me now that I have done wrong."

Here the monomaniac tore off the towel bandage in her earnestness.

"It isn't as if I hadn't had warning, you know. I am dying with my eyes open, Ozem."

"As it were," added he, solemnly.

"And I feel the responsibility of you now in these last moments just the same as I have felt it all my life. You must marry again, Ozem, and I want you to choose somebody before I die."

"Why, I didn't know 'twas customary," began Ozem, in a deprecatory tone.

"It is not, generally, I'll admit; but circumstances alter cases, Ozem, and I don't see any harm in our looking these things in the face, and talking it over together. There, dear, I drew that last breath a little easier. I've got a reprieve this time, but I must finish what I was going to say, for there is no knowing how soon I may be taken speechless."

Mr. Page twirled his thumbs, and looked really embarrassed. He usually had his lesson by heart, but this time the eccentric wife of his bosom had taken him by surprise, and he was not a man who knew what to say or do in an emergency.

"It isn't everybody that would be satisfied with you, Ozem. I don't say it to hurt your feelings, but just to put you on your guard. It isn't everybody that would marry you; but I shouldn't wonder a bit if Sister Bumpus would be glad of the chance."

This was before her betrothal to Mr. Bangs.

"What, Thurzy Bumpus! I can't help it if she would!" cried Ozem, roused to sudden and vehement self-assertion. "She's the homeliest woman I ever set eyes on — seems if."

"She's a blessed follower of the Lord," said Mrs. Page, with a side glance at the looking-glass as she gathered up her back hair. "She would care for your spiritual interests, Ozem. But I shan't insist upon Thurzy, for there are other women as pious as she is, who have better features; and you know all I want is to set you thinking upon the subject, which is only wise forethought, I'm sure."

"Well, I'll do anything in reason to please you," said the affectionate husband; "but I can truly say I don't want to marry Thurzy, if there is any way of getting round it."

The shadow of a smile crept into Mrs. Page's sombre eyes at this remark, for, though anything but a humorous person, there were times when Ozem's extraordinary simplicity amused her.

"Please hand me the brush and comb, dear, and

don't look so down-hearted, for I have come back to you once more from the borders of the grave. But with regard to your marrying," added the hypochondriac, as she began to make cheerful preparations for a steamboat pudding, "I only insist upon one thing, and that is that you look round and make your own choice, and then come to me for approval, for I do feel the responsibility of you, my dear, and I shall die easier if the matter is fairly decided. I've lived through this attack, but it's no sign I shall live through the next one; there must come a last time, Ozem."

Ozem's weak brain was completely turned, and he walked in a dream for the rest of the day.

"What a singular woman Dorkis is! But I positively declare there's some truth in what she says. I should be the poorest hand in the world to get along alone. I shall miss her desperately, that's a fact. I haven't known what it was to be in the house five minutes without hearing her groan — it comes 'most as natural as the ticking of the clock. Poor Dorkis!" — leaning on his hoe-handle reflectively,—"but she has got to die — I suppose there's no doubt of that — sooner or later, and as these spasms keep growing more and more frequent, I presume she's nearer her end than what she was a month ago, say. 'There must come a last time, Ozem;' that sounds to me kind of prophetic. 'I only insist on one thing,' said she, 'and that is that you look round and make your own choice, and then come to me, for I shall die,' etcettery, etcettery. That sounds singular; but then there isn't a woman anywhere about that has such a headpiece as what Dorkis has. I always trusted to her judgment, and came out

straight. Some folks might be jealous that she ain't in her right mind, but I never saw her stir up a pudding any more regular than she did just now. There's only one thing that looks a little suspicious to me," mused he, peering into the hole he had made with his hoe, "she seemed to think it doubtful about my getting hardly anybody to have me. Now that strikes me as odd. It's different, you know, from what it would be if I was a widower with four or five little children, and no means of support. Now I stand well in this town; haven't I been deputy sheriff? ain't I received in some of the best families? Now, there are the Asburys, they belong to the aristocracy, if anybody does, and what did Helen say to me the other day about the favors I had done them in the way of errands? Hark! there's the dinner-bell. I dread to go into the house, for now Dorkis has taken up this notion, I shan't hear the last of it — seems if."

He was right. The half-crazed woman carried her new whimsey to the usual lengths, and sounded it in his ears till the thought of a second wife grew familiar, and ere long ceased to shock his sense of propriety. The strange scene into which he was betrayed in consequence may seem too absurd for belief, but I beg to state that it is substantially true.

And now we will return to Helen.

"Ozem pulled with a will." — Page 221.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHARLY'S SECRET.

"For prying into any human affairs, none are equal to those whom it does not concern."

MEDUMSCOTT POND, August 25.

DEAR Di: *Have* you suffered a sea-change into something rich and strange? For when I write you now I don't feel quite at my ease; it almost seems as if Queen Vic would be peeping over your shoulder while you read. If she is, I hope she will pardon these bits of paper; they were torn out of cousin Morris's note-book, for I am at Medumscott Pond, and of course didn't bring my writing desk. We are having a very gay party, and I am wearing on my head a hat seventy-five years old, that belonged to great-grandma Dillingham — the most comical thing you ever saw. The front and crown both flare up six inches skyward, then make a courtesy and meet in the middle. I felt just like wearing it, and it was a bright idea, for it has kept everybody laughing. There are twenty-five of us, and all gone fishing but Miss Liscom and myself. She sits under a pine-tree, reading, and I only wish she'd fix her eyes on her book. I don't like fishing, but I would have gone in a minute if I had had the faintest idea

'Peaky' was to be my companion. Cousin Morris offered to stay, but I wouldn't listen to such a thing, and then he started for the boat with Sharly on his arm. It amused me to see how adroitly she managed to walk with him instead of Mr. Hackett, whom she can't abide, because everybody calls him such a "worthy young man." By her means it happened that Mr. Hackett and Judith Willard went together, and I saw a few wise ones smile, for it is the darling desire of Quinnebasset to have that old engagement renewed. People say Judith is too dreamy and cold ever to marry, and I know there is a look on her lovely face that makes you think "her soul is like a star, and dwells apart;" still, I have my own opinion about one or two things, and will tell you by and by whether I am right.

But speaking of Sharly: I am still in the dark about her. She is all smiles to-day, but half the time looks worried and absent-minded, stays alone for hours, and though her color is as bright as ever, I never saw her so thin. Mrs. Page advises podophyllon; but it seems to me the trouble is in her mind instead of her liver. Nothing blighting, such as "a worm in the bud," or that sort of nonsense; but I think the dear child's conscience is reproaching her for not having done more towards the support of the family. I am afraid this is it, for she keeps saying she can't afford pretty things to wear, because she has been such a drone. I always tell her she has done as much as I in a certain way, for she has made sunshine in the house by her bright face and pleasant smiles, and surely sunshine is better than dollars and cents — it is heaven's own gold. That silk dress I brought pleased her very much, and I am going

to talk to you by and by about some lovely trifles I know she would like. You remember your rash promise about buying things — don't you begin to repent? I am earning so much from the sale of my pictures, that I feel quite elated, and almost think it will be right to stay at home this year with mother and the blessed children. I am debating to-day whether I ought to go to St. Louis or not, for I have had another letter from that Mr. De Witt. I must decide by to-morrow; but I won't trouble you with my *pros* and *cons*. It goes against the grain to talk about money matters on this beautiful day; you just want to lie under the trees, and look, and listen, and do nothing else but be happy. What do the sky and water know of "getting a living"? A thousand insects are playing on their tiny trombones, but they never call on you for sixpence. The birds sing as confidently as if they knew and rejoiced in what our Saviour said about caring for the sparrows. The gray-headed thistles are holding a sort of "Aged Brotherhood meeting," but they won't need any funds to "carry them through the winter." I wish you were here, Di, for the whole world seems glad. As dear Lucy Larcom says, —

> "All things are beautiful,
> Because of something lovelier than themselves,
> Which breathes within them, and will never die."

The tree-trunks are picturesque with bright mosses and sundry "tag-locks" of wool, which show that sheep have passed by. Thistle-down floats in the air as light as wandering thoughts, and now and then an antique raspberry, having lived out its little glowing life, drops

to the ground to rise no more. I'm so glad I'm alive! (Delia Liscom, keep your eyes on your book!) But it is so warm, and the air is so heavy with the odors of pine and sweet-fern, that, if you'll excuse me, I believe I'll take a nap.

Ah, it would be many a long and bitter hour before Helen would sleep! She had just rolled her waterproof cape into a pillow, and was lying down, as she supposed, to pleasant dreams, when Delia Liscom arose and came slowly towards her, trailing an oak branch in the sand.

"So you've finished your writing, Helen? I'm glad, for it seems sort of unsocial to sit here and not speak, now don't it? Wonder how long they'll be out fishing?"

"Not later than noon, I presume, if we are to have the chowder at one," replied Helen, languidly.

"Yes; and we are to be home by three without fail. Mr. Lynde promised me that, or I wouldn't have come. I do hope I shall have good luck with the chowder. Do you prefer it with onions or without?"

"Without."

"Do you? Well, I must get a vote on that question. How Mr. Lynde does like fishing, Helen! Isn't it funny?"

"Yes; very."

"Almost boyish about it, you know. I do think it's splendid when people can throw off care, and enjoy themselves as he does — don't you?"

"Yes."

"And I don't call them heartless or frivolous for it; but some people do, and I say it's a shame. A man can

be just as good a Christian, and yet be full of fun; and, for my part, I stand up for Morris Lynde. He may be rather fickle, — I won't dispute that, — but light-complexioned people are apt to be fickle; didn't you ever think of it, Helen?"

"I can't say I ever did."

"Why, how strange! Now, when I see anybody with a fair skin, I don't look for much depth of feeling, or any real warmth, you know; and I've noticed it a thousand times, though I always insist upon it people are not to blame for their natural dispositions."

Thus far Delia's words had produced no impression upon Helen beyond a feeling of annoyance at the loss of her nap.

"Of course artists make the poorest kind of husbands, if you come to that," went on Delia, innocently; "but I don't believe Mr. Lynde has any intention of marrying — do you? It has always seemed to me that he likes to amuse himself with pretty faces, but doesn't care to settle down — what do you think?"

"Perhaps so," replied Helen, "settling down" into her pillow.

Delia looked at her keenly. There was something about this young girl that always baffled her. Had she no weak side? If she was going on in this way, answering in cool monosyllables, how was it possible to come to the point with her, and tell her the story she ought to hear?

"She is Dillingham all over, and I don't feel free with her any more than I do with her aunt Hinsdale," thought Delia, listening to a woodpecker beating out its brains against a tree.

"Doesn't Sharly look pretty to-day?" she began again, and the reply was more encouraging this time.

"Yes, lovely, I think."

"And Mr. Lynde admires her — how evident that is."

Helen picked an inch-worm off her dress and threw it away.

"But Sharly hasn't been as well as usual this summer, has she? Seems to me she looks thin."

"Do you think so?" asked Helen, anxiously. "She never complains."

"O, I dare say it's nothing serious — some little affair of the heart, probably," said Miss Liscom, braiding oak-leaves into a chain. "You young girls will have these tender experiences, you know."

"Isn't it growing very warm here by the water? Suppose we go farther into the shade?" said Helen, rising.

Miss Liscom followed, with a desperate resolve.

"I don't want to say or do anything that looks like interfering, Helen; but may I ask you one plain question as a friend? Did you ever think it possible that Sharly was interested in your cousin Morris?"

Helen turned with a look of intense surprise.

"We are all interested in him, Miss Liscom. Do you mean that she cares particularly? If so, you are very much mistaken."

She had spoken hastily, and regretted it the next moment. Was this the person with whom one would choose to discuss family affairs? Yet she had given her an advantage, and Delia was not slow to improve it.

"Why, Helen, you don't mean to tell me now that

this is all news to you? But of course you would be the last to see it, for you are the most unsuspicious person I ever beheld!"

Helen walked on towards a thicket, and her tormentor pursued.

"I always knew you were very artless and straightforward, and everybody admires you for it; but there is such a thing as carrying it too far, and there are times when friends, if they are friends, ought to speak."

Helen found it hard to restrain her temper.

"Please let us talk of something else, Miss Liscom. I am very sure my sister Sharly would not like to overhear us imagining all this about her."

"Imagining? Do you take me for an idle gossip, Helen Asbury? Do you suppose I would be at the trouble of coming to you with anything like this unless I was sure it was true, and you ought to know it?"

There was a glow in Delia's eyes that looked like righteous indignation. Helen began to wonder if the woman really believed in herself.

"To be frank with you, I really wanted to go fishing, but wouldn't do it because I was afraid I might not have such a good chance to talk to you again very soon. And now you treat me as if I were meddling. If I wasn't sustained by the thought that I'm doing my duty, I would shut my lips together, Helen Asbury, and let this thing go on."

"But, Miss Liscom, why need you tell it to me? Even if it were true, I have no right to know it. What have I to do with Sharly's affairs?"

"It is not for me to say what you are to do; but if you ask my advice —"

"I do not ask your advice, Miss Liscom. Beg pardon, but you are mistaken from beginning to end."

Helen seated herself under the shade of a beech tree, and Delia reclined at her feet.

"How that loon does screech! Don't you abominate a loon, Helen? — Well, so I am mistaken, am I? I imagine all this! — and there's nothing the matter with Sharly?"

"I thought we had dismissed the subject, Miss Liscom?"

"Just as you please; but what if I can prove every word I've said? Will you accuse me of lying then?"

Delia fanned herself with the oak bough, and looked over-heated; but Helen's face, under the antique bonnet, grew white with a nameless dread.

"Come now, Helen, drop a little of your dignity, and let's talk together confidentially. Can't you put faith in me when I tell you the poor little thing is dead in love with Morris Lynde, or do you want me to prove it?"

"I have already told you it is a mistake, an impossibility," said Helen, steadily, for she knew the least quaver of the voice would betray her to the sharp-witted Delia.

"I think you might believe my word, Helen Asbury — I'm sorry you won't; but if you demand proof, here it is," said she, taking a paper from her pocket, and passing it, with a subdued sparkle of the eye, to Helen. "It is directed to you. Read it."

Then, with surprising tact, Delia withdrew to another

tree, four or five yards away, and pretended to pick moss. She had, after all, a little womanly delicacy, and perhaps some pity for the distress she knew Helen was about to suffer.

The paper was a half sheet foolscap, folded, ready for an envelope, and the handwriting was Sharly's. Helen stared at it spellbound. It did not seem as if she read, but as if the words spoke aloud in her ear, —

"To my Sister: Ah, my sister, my sister! Sometimes I think I must tell you my heart is just breaking — but what would you care? Would you help me? Eyes have you, but see not; ears have you, but hear not, or you would know by this time that it is I he loves — and not you. I saw in the first place that you had appropriated him; you took it all for granted, and so did I — upon my word and honor, I did. I never flirted with him; I was very careful about that. But there are some things one can't help feeling, and some things one can't help knowing; and I found it all out after a while, and so did he. You would not blame me if you knew what Mr. —— has said to me, and you wouldn't blame him either. Not that he — But you never will know, for I shall not have the courage to tell you. You are standing between me and the sun, but you won't go away. You are selfish, and that is why you don't see things as they are. Now I shall tear this up, and you will be none the wiser, for I *can't* let you look into my heart."

The loon screamed again, and a farmer's wife on the other side of the pond blew a horn to call the workmen to dinner. Helen heard nothing; she was still

reading. It might have been five minutes that she sat without moving; then she rose, and deliberately walked over to Delia.

"Where did you find this bit of nonsense?"

Delia looked up amazed at such coolness.

"I found it on Miss O'Neil's entry floor, yesterday noon."

"Did Miss O'Neil see it?"

"No; I presume Sharly had just dropped it out of her pocket. She had been in to carry a dish of soup."

"Have you showed it to any one but me?"

"Helen Asbury, what sort of person do you take me for? Do you think I'd want to expose that poor child's weakness to the world? No, I have not showed it to any one else, and should not have showed it to you, if you had been civil enough to believe me without it!"

"Thank you, Miss Liscom. You have meant to be kind, and I do thank you very much. I am afraid I have been rude."

She extended her hand, and Delia grasped it with ready forgiveness.

"You see this is something Sharly must have scribbled for amusement; and she would be dreadfully ashamed if she knew any one had seen it. You will never speak of it, Miss Liscom; do promise you never will."

"Of course not; you may depend upon me," said Delia, so much overawed by a certain something in Helen's manner that she dared not say another word, though she had almost hoped to be called on for advice and condolence, and was chagrined to find that both were unneeded.

Had the girl no feeling? If she had any, and could brave it out like this, she was one of a thousand.

"She is sort of stunned, and doesn't take the sense of it yet," mused Delia; "but she thinks more of that bit of paper than she pretends to, else why didn't she tear it up instead of hiding it in her bosom? I declare, for my part, I'd give a cookie to know how Mr. Lynde stands affected! Needn't tell me Sharly was the one he meant when he wrote that letter to Mrs. Asbury, and said, 'The desire of my heart is not yet granted.' I'd give anything if I hadn't come across that sentence, for it has worried me 'most to death, and there's no prospect of my ever being any the wiser. Only seems as if it couldn't be *me*, or he WOULD have spoken before now."

The sail-boat was coming back. Presently there was a sound of laughter and merry voices, as the draggled party wound slowly up the bank, followed by two fishermen bearing the result of the morning's work — the ponderous fishes, as Mr. Hackett called them — in a bushel basket.

Then Helen and Delia heard how Mr. Lynde had caught more fish than any one else; how Eleonora Jones had screamed "a nibble! a nibble!" more than fifty times, and finally secured a prize in the shape of a smoked herring, which Mr. Hackett wouldn't own he had fastened to her hook; how Judith Willard had lost her ring in the pond, and Sharly had made a sensation by landing an eel as big as a sea-serpent.

The bare recollection of it was too much for Sharly's nerves, and she hung her lily-crowned head, and clung to Mr. Lynde with pretty little terrors, while the story was told.

Helen listened to everything, and smiled indulgently upon Sharly; but after the talking was mostly over, and the serious business of frying and stewing had begun, she tilted her comical bonnet over her eyes, stood up white and still, and gazed from Sharly to Mr. Lynde, as if she would read their souls.

Miss Liscom regretted, for once in her life, her famous skill in chowder-making, for she wanted to linger near the interesting group, and take notes of their behavior. But as she bent over the stone fireplace, watching pork and potatoes, she could catch a sentence now and then from the leading characters in the drama.

"Why, Helen," remarked Mr. Lynde, "your eyes are the eyes of the gazelle when she is troubled about her little ones, to quote from the Arabs. Have you and Miss Liscom been telling ghost stories — or what's the matter?"

"Only mourning for the fishes, Morris. Every one of those little fishes expected to become a whale, poor thing!"

"Well, what if he did? It was a dream he had no right to indulge in, and he was sure to be disappointed sooner or later."

"Dear me!" said Sharly, "what a pity dreams can't be realized — don't you think so, Mr. Hackett?"

"Some dreams — yes."

"Helen looks as if she had a contrary opinion," said Mr. Lynde. "What were you going to say, Helen?"

"I was not going to say anything; I was only thinking dreams are cruel things sometimes. I like the bald, simple truth a great deal better."

"I know it," said Sharly; "we've got one looking-

glass in the house that flatters, and she won't go near it. O, Morris, will you please see if you can't do something to my parasol? It keeps shutting up as fast as I open it."

"Good by," said Helen; "I'm going to help set the table."

Delia watched her moving about very quietly, taking pies, cakes, bread, and parcels of sugar, salt, and pepper out of the baskets, while young Mrs. Willard, Judith, and Margaret Hinsdale laid the damask table-cloths, and placed the dishes. It was of no use trying to meet her eye — it was always averted; but at dinner Delia observed that she sat beside Mr. Jones, made wrong answers to his questions, ate little, and looked across the table continually at Sharly and Mr. Lynde. She was secured from all eyes but Delia's, for hungry people at a picnic have no time to speculate on the workings of other people's minds.

Mr. Lynde scarcely glanced at Helen, for, placed between Miss Jones and Sharly, he had all he could do to keep the young nymphs supplied with coffee and edibles. And then, going home, he happened to sit at one end of the hay-rack, and Helen at the other; and Sharly — by his side — sang so sweetly all through the pine woods, and across the plains, that nobody felt like talking; and if Helen was more silent than usual, nobody remarked it but Delia, and the ever attentive and gallant Mr. Jones.

Mr. Hackett had a surprise for the party which he kept till the very last — it was Judith's lost ring. He had marked at the time the precise spot where it fell, close by the shore, had seen it lying glittering in the

sun, though no one else perceived it, and had gone back quietly, dived in and secured it, and now presented it to Judith, with great solemnity, on the point of her parasol.

Of course there was much laughing and marvelling; and though nobody uttered a single jest, everybody secretly thought the finding of the ring was ominous.

On the whole, it had been a jolly fishing party.

"I declare I never had so good a time in my life," said Sharly, as Morris helped her out of the hay-rack.

CHAPTER XXV.

HELEN'S CONFLICT.

THERE were callers at the Asburys, coming and going, one after another, till tea-time, and it was seven o'clock before Helen could venture to be alone. Then she walked slowly, very slowly, up stairs, as if the overwhelming desire she felt to rush away from the whole world must be kept in check, or some one would divine how she suffered.

"Did you have a first-rate time, Helen?" called out Thurzy from the dark passage, where she stood fastening a scarlet ribbon in her hair. "I heard the curiousest story yesterday about Morris Lynde. You couldn't guess what it was if you should suffer."

Helen fairly shivered. If she could only have reached her own room without this!

"Somebody said they heard he was engaged to Delia Liscom. It was Liddy Ann Crane, and she said it just to see what she could get out of me."

Helen had gained the door of her chamber, and held the latch in her hand.

"But she didn't get much. I said I couldn't tell how that was, but I believed Delia had been paying him some attention."

Helen knew she was expected to laugh at this,

but could not. Why would not everybody let her alone?

"Then Liddy Ann goes to pumping me about you, but I was amazing ignorant. Of course I can see plain enough how it stands between you and him; but do you suppose I'm going round peddling stories to the neighbors?"

"How things stand between you and him!"

Helen passed quickly into her room, and shut the door. Next moment she regretted that she had not undeceived Thurzy. It was too late now, but she must do it to-morrow, in a quiet, matter-of-course way, so that there should be no further mistakes. Nothing like this must happen again; she could not bear it. She seated herself by the window, and looked out. She had not "let herself down" yet; she would not think, she would not feel, for the children might be up at any moment to carry her off bodily: they never could get through an evening without her.

"But I cannot go down stairs to-night; I would not risk myself in that parlor for a thousand worlds! Doesn't my head ache? Yes, I think so — in fact, I am sure of it; I shall say I must go to bed. I am looking at the moon now; that is what I am doing. Is Sharly really — really — Is that why she shuts herself in her room so much? Is that why she laughs and cries? Then Dr. Prescott needn't give her wine of calisaya, for it won't help her, poor little thing! Hush, I'm looking at the moon — that is what I am doing. — Is that you, Vic? Come in. No, dear, I can't help you sing, I have a headache and ought to be in bed."

"But it isn't singing. Cousin Morris wants you to go to walk."

"Not if my head aches."

"Then you can lie on the sofa, you know. We want you where we can look at you. If you act like Sharly, and stay off by yourself, we won't stand it. You never spoke but twice at supper-time, and Van noticed it as much as I did."

"Come and kiss me, Vic. You do love sister Helen, don't you? And if you do, don't tease, but go right away like a good girl, and give my compliments to everybody, and tell mother she needn't come up to see how I am, for it was only that bonnet that tired me all out, and I thought I'd just go to bed and get rested."

Helen dared not see her mother. She was afraid she might open her heart to her, and it was always a little uncertain whether she could be trusted. Eyes, or voice, or manner were apt to betray Mrs. Asbury, even when she tried her best to keep a secret. It was a pity, but it happened to be so with both the people Helen would have chosen to confide in — with mamma and Di Cary.

Vic went away muttering, and Helen waited till the last unwilling footstep had died on the stairs, then rose and fastened the door. She need no longer bribe her aching heart to keep the peace; she would shut out that German-silver moon, and be quite alone. — But who was that walking on the bank? O, it was Morris and Sharly; who else should it be? Sharly talking fast, and raising her eyes from time to time to Morris's face, as if asking a question; but he had his hands folded behind him, and his gaze fixed on the ground. Once he looked up at her window, and she was glad there was no lamp lighted, and she could creep into a

dark corner unobserved. Why would Sharly persist in talking? He was thinking, and did not wish to be disturbed. Helen never spoke to him when he was in that mood; but Sharly did not understand him as she did; how was it possible?

It was, maybe, a little odd, but Helen thought of Morris at this moment as her very own; and, what was odder still, she did not recognize the ownership as any new thing. It had been so all along; they belonged to each other, and they both knew it, and the idea that a third person could come between them was simply absurd.

"There, they are walking towards the house now, and he is looking up to the window again, and Sharly is gazing into his face."

The daze was not quite over, and Helen did not believe that story yet: it lacked internal evidence; it didn't sound at all like Sharly.

"Delia's teeth are false, and so is her mouth," said Helen, moving restlessly towards the looking-glass, and beginning to brush her hair; "and she found me very easily imposed upon, didn't she? But no, to do Delia justice, she couldn't and wouldn't make up such a bold-faced lie as that; besides, it was certainly Sharly's writing."

Helen lighted the lamp now, and taking the crumpled missive from her bosom, smoothed it, and eagerly scanned every dreadful word and letter.

"Ah, my sister, my sister, sometimes I think I must tell you my heart is just breaking!"

It was Sharly's. There was no mistaking that peculiar little j, set too high above the line, that swan-necked

capital E; and, certainly, if Delia Liscom had been ever so wickedly disposed, she could not have got possession of Sharly's gold pen with one broken nib, and made those little spatters of ink in the middle of the page. Dear, wretched little Sharly! She had imagined all this about Morris, and had been foolish enough to commit her thoughts to paper, not intending that any living soul should see what she had written, least of all Miss Liscom, but her habitual carelessness had brought the story to light. Helen would have given worlds if she could have saved her sister from this mortification, but the deed had been done, and what mercy was to be expected of Delia now?

It was not the future exposure, though, that troubled Helen just now, — it was poor Sharly's unhappiness. When you came to think of it, who could wonder she was interested in Morris, a man so superior to the rest of his sex? She must be as insensible as granite if she could help it. Helen not only excused her, but loved her all the better for her unspeakable misfortune, for nobody could know so well as she what a blessing the poor child had prayed for, and missed. Sharly had always been her especial care, and her heart yearned over her now with such motherly tenderness that she would almost have given up Morris for her sake; that is, if lovers were transferable, "which fortunately they are not," as Helen thought with a secure little smile.

"You would not blame me, if you knew what he has said to me." Could it be that Morris — What had he said? He loved the whole family, and had an affectionate way of speaking; but Sharly knew him too well to be deceived by that. She must mean some-

thing more, something different. If she had only quoted one little sentence! That agonizing first doubt which Helen had felt at Medumscott Pond came back to her again, and with it another doubt that had never troubled her before.

Surely it *was* strange, in all her long, happy talks with Morris, when his eyes seemed so full of tender meanings, he had not once spoken of love. Not that she had cared for, or expected it, only she did wish something to hold on by just now, something definite and sure. He had almost said so many precious things — he had never quite said anything. Then again she certainly had thought his manner was rather different of late, more formal and reserved, though that hardly expressed it either. Had the change begun since they came home (she spurned the question, but it would rise), since he had seen Sharly again? She did not know — she could not remember: but there really was a change, else why should she have thought of it at all? And what could have caused it? What was this indefinite, shifting shadow which hung over him? Once she might have thought it was the memory of that unknown southern lady; but now the idea did not even occur to her, for she had long ago laid that ghost, and it would never walk again.

"There is something, I know there is something — but it isn't, it can't be, Sharly!"

She felt an inward conviction of what she said; but, after all, what do convictions amount to against facts? She knew as well as she knew anything that there was no congeniality between Morris and Sharly; but what of that either? Hadn't she heard that congeniality is for friends, not lovers?

"And Sharly is so beautiful! It seems very strange that looks should have anything to do with liking," thought the poor girl, with a troubled gaze at the glass; "but I suppose it has — yes, I really suppose it has — that is, with men's liking. And how much Morris has always admired Sharly! He has been frank enough certainly, yet I never dreamed of this! And now she wants me to go away, for then she thinks she shall be happy. But where shall I go?"

She could only sit there, and listen to the tormenting thoughts of her brain, as one endures the surgeon's knife. Why, it was all so new, the pain and the capacity for pain! She had always believed in love, but O, not in anything unreasonable! She had supposed it would come when called for, and be perfectly orthodox and proper — a sentiment as convenient and adjustable as the little girl's doll's "hair that takes off and puts on;" but here was something she did not know what to do with; a tree of forbidden fruit which she should never, never be able to tear up by the roots!

"Ellie won't suffer," said she; but she buried her face in her hands, and her hands tingled to the finger-tips with shame. Hadn't she always cried out against girls who gave their hearts away before they were asked?

"Don't be sorrowful, darling," sang Sharly's exquisite voice down stairs, accompanied by Morris's flute — in admirable accord.

Time passed; the clock struck ten, and soon after she heard a chorus of merry "good nights," and the closing of the front door. She could not believe in that letter yet; she must ask Sharly a few questions

first; so, when she heard her coming up stairs, she unfastened the door and called for her to come in.

Sharly entered with a smile, thinking of a witty repartee she had just given Morris.

"Why, Helen, you are shockingly pale; shan't I get you something?"

"No. Just look in the glass, and see how your eyes shine! I only wanted to have a little talk with you. You don't seem happy nowadays, Sharly — not as you were last summer."

"Me? O, I am happy enough."

But as she spoke, the smile was gone.

"You don't seem to be happy," repeated Helen, watching her closely.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because you stay in your room so much."

"Poh! what a queer reason!"

"Is it? Well, I only thought there might be some trouble on your mind that you wanted to tell, but hadn't the courage — and I — well I just wanted to say, 'Don't be afraid of sister Helen,' that's all. There's nothing in this world she wouldn't do for little Sharly."

"You're an old darling," said Sharly, falling on her knees, and hiding her head in her sister's lap. "I've sometimes thought — But, pshaw! there's nothing ails me, only I — I —"

Then it was all true, and there *was* something to tell.

"*Don't* be afraid, Sharly."

It was Helen herself who was afraid. It would be terrible to her to hear Sharly utter such a confession

as she had written on that slip of paper; but she shut her eyes, and went on, —

"I would hold out my right hand to have it cut off for your sake; so speak, and tell me all about it. *Don't* be afraid!"

"How good you are, Helen. But what makes you talk so? I wouldn't give up anything for your sake, and why should you for mine?"

"Because I am older and stronger than you, Sharly, and because mother put you in my care when she died."

Sharly raised her head, and pressed her lips to her sister's cheek; but before her face could be seen, she had veiled it in a golden mist of hair.

"Ah, Helen, the truth is —" Helen's heart beat thick. "I can't tell you this, I really can't, for you would think I am so foolish," said Sharly, twisting her fingers nervously.

"Never; I promise you I never would."

"But I know you couldn't help it, Helen."

"Try me, and see."

"But I can't tell you to-night," said the poor child. "Wait a while; please wait."

"Forever," said Helen, her last hope gone.

Delia Liscom was right: the slip of paper was genuine; and the sooner she went away from home the better.

"Don't try to tell me, Sharly. I've been wrong to press you so. I don't want to know a single word about it: all I want is for you to bid me good night and go to bed."

"Well, good night, then," said Sharly, in a tone of relief, for the interview had evidently made her uncom-

fortable. "O, but I have a message for you from cousin Morris."

With what studied indifference she spoke his name!

"He's going off with a trouting party to-morrow, and left his love and good bys to you, for he won't be back before midnight, and hopes your head will be better before he sees you."

"He shall not see me," thought Helen.

For the whole night she lay awake, thinking. This was the first purely personal trial she had ever known. Her grief for her father had been shared with mother and sisters; this heartache was hers alone, and no other human being had part or lot in the matter. She could not go to Morris with it, as she had gone with everything else, though, strangely enough, she half believed that, if she only could go, he would explain the whole mystery, and set her mind at rest. She was by no means sure he cared for Sharly. In spite of a thousand growing doubts, she still clung to her unreasoning trust, as girls will. But she said to herself, if it was possible for him to care for Sharly, she would not stand in the way; if there was a fickle drop of blood in his veins, she wanted to know it now. She did not think there was any magnanimity in her leaving home. Sharly longed to be rid of her, and that was enough. It was very fortunate that this situation had offered; she would not have hesitated to accept it now, if the school had been in the wilds of Africa. "Any port in a storm," was the cry of her heart.

Mrs. Asbury was shocked, next morning, at Helen's wretched looks, and blamed herself for neglect.

"You have been really ill," said she, "and I did not go to you."

"No, not ill, only thinking, and that never agrees with me," said Helen, looking at Sharly's bright face, and almost believing the whole story must be a horrible nightmare.

How she longed to talk with her mother, and ask for her sympathy and advice!

"I have been debating whether to go to St. Louis or not. Don't you suppose I could earn a great deal more money if I should teach, as well as paint pictures?" said she, feeling like a deceitful wretch.

"O, you mustn't, we shan't let you!" cried the children, one after another; and Harebell, taking the whole thing for granted, began to cry.

"I did not suppose you thought seriously of it," said Mrs. Asbury, surprised. "I hoped we were going to keep you at home."

"I declare it's downright selfish of you to talk of such a thing," said Sharly, pouting; but Helen thought she looked secretly pleased, nevertheless. The dear girl did sometimes make affectionate little speeches, just to save people's feelings.

"But you won't decide upon this till you've seen Morris?" said Mrs. Asbury.

"Why not? Morris has nothing to do with it, mamma. You understand I must make up my mind to-day, for if I meet those people in Portland, I shall have to go to-morrow, and of course I'd rather hurry away than take all the long journey alone."

"Certainly, if you must go at all."

"Now, let me lay the reasons before you, my friends, and see what the junto will decide it's best for me to do."

She talked very calmly and reasonably — out of the

logical side of her brain; but the children could see by her face that the die was cast, and at the end of every sentence they joined in a chorus of unavailing wails.

It was the first time our Helen had ever set up her own will in direct opposition to that of her sisters, when they would be made unhappy by such a course; but she was impelled now by an "inward must," and even Sharly's tears were of no avail.

Mrs. Asbury was the first to yield the point.

"Children," said she, "Helen is old enough to decide for herself, and as she is going because she really thinks she ought to go, we will not make it harder for her; we will do all we can to help her off."

So, before noon it was a settled thing, and the twins spent two hours cracking oil-nuts and filling a paper with the "saddlebags," well salted with their tears.

When Helen went to bid her aunt Marian and Mrs. Page good by, Mrs. Page said, with neighborly good will, that Ozem should take her to Poonoosac, for he was going down next morning early with the last churning of butter. And Helen, who seemed of late to have become the victim of adverse fates, said, "Thank you, Mrs. Page," without even looking at Ozem, whom it was not customary to consider in any other light than that of a humble instrument.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OZEM'S OBEDIENCE.

"If all fools wore white caps, we should seem a flock of geese."

IF Helen had known what was before her, she would have walked all the way to Poonoosac, sooner than have ridden with Mr. Page. But as she suspected nothing particularly amiss with his brain beyond the usual lack of common sense, she considered herself fortunate to have him for an escort. To be sure, he was obliged to go an hour earlier than the stage, for the mornings were warm, and he had a week's churning of butter in the neat wagon, hidden from view by a curtain of carriage-cloth; but Helen was glad to go early, for she dreaded a meeting with Morris.

It was a strange flitting. The good bys had sunk to her heart, and her eyes were heavy with tears and loss of sleep, as she drove with Mr. Page down the broad village street, saying to herself, —

"'Ellie *won't* suffer.' If I can't be happy, there is no reason why I should not be strong."

Long before they reached the Liscoms, Helen discerned a man's figure standing in the doorway, and knew instinctively that it was Mr. Lynde.

"Mr. Page," said she, forcing a laugh, "you'd better

drive fast, for if cousin Morris sees us, we shall have to stop and talk — and I'm tired of good bys."

Mr. Page would willingly have obeyed, but Helen had been so long revolving the speech in her mind, that it came too late, and before he could urge his horse to better speed, Mr. Lynde had come forth and waylaid them.

"An early ride, Helen?"

"Yes, Morris; I am going to St. Louis."

Mr. Lynde gazed at her in utter amazement.

"It is the school I told you of; but I didn't fairly decide till yesterday. Good by."

But good by was of no avail, when he was holding both her hands, and the horse was standing stock still.

"The St. Louis school?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't tell me, Helen?"

She quietly released one hand, and arranged her veil. What right had he to put that slight emphasis on the pronoun *me?*

"You went away, you know."

"Helen, won't you look at me?"

She could not but raise her eyes then, though his gaze as it met hers was drawing her heart away from her control.

"Helen, this is very strange."

Mr. Page's eyes of baby-blue were fixed inquiringly upon the pair, who seemed to have forgotten his existence entirely.

"I thought I would make as few words as possible, Morris, that's all. Don't you think it is easier to slip away unceremoniously?"

"No."

He had reclaimed the wandering hand.

"Well, good by, Morris; you see we are detaining Mr. Page — and the butter will melt."

"Beg pardon, but unquestionably we ought to be going," said Ozem, gently jerking the reins.

"Helen," said Mr. Lynde, quite insensible to the claims of the butter, "I don't understand one word of this. All I know is that you will be at the station two hours before the cars leave. Why won't you let me drive you down, by and by, if you must go, and on the way you can tell me what it all means."

"O, no, no, no!" cried Helen, in the very words of the little fly when entreated by the cunning spider.

"But we will go instantly if you wish to have any time at Poonoosac."

"O, no, no, no!" repeated she, with passionate emphasis; "no, thank you, Morris. The butter is melting every minute. Good by. Please don't detain us. Go up to our house, and they'll tell you all about it. Good by."

It was three against one; for by this time the horse also had waked to proper anxiety about the butter, and was beginning to move on. Morris was left standing in the street, gazing after the neat buggy, and wondering whether there were not some other reason, invisible as the pail of butter, for this singular haste. It was not in the least like Helen to treat an old friend so coldly. He had offended her; or was it possible that she had heard — Here his face changed from perplexity to a look of the keenest annoyance.

"I meant to tell her myself, but was't man enough, and now she has heard it, and despises me."

He went at once to Intervale Cottage, but learned very little beyond the fact that everybody had been crying.

"Aunt Katharine, what upon earth does this mean?"

"She was obliged to hurry away to meet those people. Don't say a word, Morris; I'm heart-broken enough already."

"What people?"

"Why, the Pardees — didn't she tell you?"

"She told me nothing. O, yes, now I remember, the Pardees were teachers. But, aunt Katharine, *why* did she go?"

Morris and his aunt were standing together in the front doorway, and his eyes were fixed keenly on her face; but he was satisfied by her questioning look that she was not aware of the change in Helen towards himself.

"Why, my dear boy, you understand it just as well as I do. There's no mystery about it; only I wish she had let me send word to you this morning, as I suggested. I was sure you'd like to drive her to Poonoosac, if you only knew."

"She did not honor me so far," replied Mr. Lynde, moving the grass with his cane.

"O, she thought you would be too tired, she said."

"Aunt Katharine, I regret her going; I disapprove of it. It is too much for her."

"I fear you are right; but how could I help it, Morris? We need the money, and she could not earn so much in any other way."

"Money," echoed Morris, impatiently. "Aunt Katharine, I wonder you will continually deny me the pleas-

ure of helping you. What would a few hundreds, more or less, signify to me? Yet every time I allude to such a thing, you motion me away with both hands."

"My noble boy, you forget that I have already accepted several presents from you, and my pride hasn't been hurt; but with my girls it is quite different. You can't blame them for wishing to be independent, can you? — when there isn't the slightest relationship between you?"

"Be careful what you say!" called out a sweet young voice overhead; "I hear every word;" and in another minute Sharly had floated down stairs, and stood before them like a pink morning-glory.

It was not in the heart of man to behold such a vision of loveliness without smiling upon it, and I do not for my part indorse the cross-grained remarks made by Thurzy, as she afterwards saw the cousins walking together about the yard, with the morning sun shining on their fair heads.

"Well, Sister Page, I wouldn't have believed it of him; but he's a male cokwette!"

Mrs. Page looked mystified.

"Warn't it always your opinion that he was after our Helen?"

"Yes, I must say I have thought he seemed interested in her."

"So've I; and I guess Helen did, too. But look now, ain't he one that's dreadful easy consoled?"

"He's only talking to Sharly — the little guileless thing."

"She ain't a mite more free from guile than you or I be."

"But can't he talk to Sharly?"

"O lor'! 'tain't that. You see I kind o' joked Helen about him the other night, in a roundabout way, and she turned as red as fire, and says she, 'Thurzy,' says she, 'don't harbor such a thought for a moment. Morris and I are friends — nothing more.' 'But you will be more,' says I. 'No, never,' says she, just as serious as you please. I don't suppose she had an idea how she looked then; but she had turned as white as marble, and every mite of the sparkle had died out of her eyes. Thinks I to myself, 'I'll never plague you about him again, you dear angel creetur.' He's hurt her feelings some way, you may depend upon that, Sister Page. And here he is looking as innocent as a kitten, and flirting with Sharly! Men don't mind such things, Sister Page; I believe, for my part, the conscience is feminine."

While Thurzy was thus kneading her indignation into a loaf of hard gingerbread, Helen, Mr. Page, and the all-important butter were wending their dusty way to Poonoosac.

Mr. Page had already cleared his throat several times nervously, and as Helen turned towards him, she perceived that he seemed painfully embarrassed.

"How is Mrs. Page this morning?" asked she, rousing herself.

"Ma'am? O, very well, I thank you, ma'am," mumbled Ozem; "I mean sick — I mean indisposed, you know."

"No worse than usual, I hope, Mr. Page?"

"O, no, ma'am; a great deal better — much better," said Mr. Page, with a laugh as dry and mirthless as

the popping of corn; "that is, I should say worse — that's what I set out to say — worse, and more frequent — seems if."

A deep crimson was spreading over his rosebud complexion, and the very reins in his hands trembled. "There must be a last time, Helen, and I am beginning to be afraid she may actually die one of these days."

"It is barely possible," Helen could not help saying, roguishly; "but I am sure you have every reason to be prepared for it; and there is this consolation, Mr. Page, you have always been a kind husband."

"Well, now, that's very good of you — seems if," stammered the poor man, his whiskers fading to a pinkish white in the intense glow of his face; "and she says — she says — she told me, you know —"

Helen waited a reasonable time, but did not hear what Dorcas had told.

"Is it anything she wishes you to do?"

"Yes — O, yes; but I didn't know — it ain't customary —" Ozem wiped his brow.

"Is it something new for her cough?"

"O, no!" gasped Mr. Page, "she's got a chest full of medicine, as it were. Calico was what she named this morning; but I know I shouldn't suit her."

"He wants me to help him buy her a dress," thought Helen, remembering that Mrs. Page never ventured as far as Poonoosac, yet was extremely fastidious as to shades and qualities of goods. "Of course that's what the man means; but I wonder if he will be able to say it?"

"I've had an idee put into my head," began Mr. Page again, with a snap of the whip which urged his steed

forward, and an inadvertent shuffling of the feet which sent the butter-pail backward; "I've had an idee put into my head —" and stopped short.

"No wonder it bewilders him, if it really *is* an idea," thought Helen.

"I believe you said you wanted to say something to me, Mr. Page?"

Redder yet glowed the fires in Ozem's cheeks.

"Nothing very particular, Miss Helen," said he, snapping his teeth together audibly.

"O, then I misunderstood you."

And she fell into reverie again.

"Miss Helen, won't you please to wait a minute?" gasped Ozem. "Is there any — any — Are you engaged to Mr. Lynde, you know?"

"No," answered Helen, too much surprised to perceive that the question was an impertinence.

"O, bless me! I didn't think there was, Miss Helen. I knew you didn't — that is to say, I knew you wasn't. Very dry weather, ma'am. How's your mother this morning? and how's her health? Is Sharly pretty well? and how's *her* health? Very dry weather, ma'am, but some appearance of rain."

It was of no use for Helen to try keeping the muscles of her honest face straight, as Mr. Page uttered these disjointed sentences in a monotonous voice, like a man talking in his sleep.

"Don't be so incoherent, Mr. Page. I think I can imagine what your errand is before you give it."

"Can you, though, Miss Helen? Well, I can truly say you're the quickest-witted girl I ever saw, considering I never said a word to a living soul! I'm very

glad, for it certainly isn't customary, you know, as I told Dorkis; and if she hadn't hetchelled me into it, seems if I should certainly wait till she was dead."

"I don't see why you feel this extreme delicacy," said Helen, looking puzzled. "I should be really glad to do you a favor, only I'm afraid I shouldn't satisfy Mrs. Page."

"Yes, you would; I know you would. You're just the kind of a wife she wants me to have for all the world!"

Helen turned, and gazed at her companion in speechless amazement, but he was carefully looking another way.

"There must be a last time," said he, repeating his lesson, with his eye fixed on the zenith. "Dorkis says it's her wish that I should look round and make my own selection, and then come to her for approval, for she says she shall die easier when it's all arranged, as it were."

"Ozem — Page!"

"She requested me to look round," went on this semi-bereaved husband, not daring to take breath till he had finished the business; "and I did, and my choice fell upon you. And as you are going away to be gone some months, I thought I'd name it to you, so you could be thinking it over, for she's liable to go sudden, and you won't be here; but I don't ask for any answer now. There ain't any hurry, you know — not as I know of — not yet — seems if."

"Do you suppose I shall sit here and listen to this, sir?"

"O, wait a minute, ma'am — wait a minute!" ex-

claimed Ozem, startled by her springing forward and seizing the reins. "I didn't mean the least harm. It was she that put the idea into my head — it was Dorkis that did it."

"Ozem — Page!" cried Helen, controlling a wild desire to laugh, "do you know that you are an unprincipled, bad man, and if I should tell Judge Davenport, he could have you put in jail?"

"Goodness sakes, Miss Helen! what have I said to stir you up so? And you helped me along, or I shouldn't have durst to say it."

The whiskers had returned to their original hue, and even more, for Ozem's face was ashy pale.

"Goodness sakes alive, ma'am, you didn't think I wanted to marry you *while* Dorkis is alive, I hope!"

"Stop the horse, Mr. Page! — now, this minute!"

"Why, we haven't got there yet, ma'am," faltered the poor culprit, in a terror of agony and remorse. "I wish I could make you look at it in the right light, ma'am."

Helen secured the reins from his trembling hands, turned the wagon half way round, and prepared for a spring.

"Shall I render you some assistance, ma'am?"

He might have had a floating vision of a sort of pulley, or inclined plane, by which to let her down, but sat quite motionless till she had fairly alighted; and then, with a deadly sober face, and eyes that seemed to be looking straight into his own grave, he drove on furiously, quite regardless of the delicately-stamped butter.

Helen had two whole miles to walk. It was warm

and dusty; and she stopped so often to give way to one of those uncontrollable fits of laughter known only to young people not far from the "giggling age," that the Poonoosac stage overtook her before she had reached the depot. It was unfortunate, for the passengers — mainly Quinnebasset people, or strangers who had boarded so long in the village as to seem like old acquaintances — had a full view of her dusty figure, and she met more than one glance of recognition and surprise cast back upon her from the coach-window. She felt a little humiliated at this, and rather nervous when obliged to go out upon the platform to identify the two trunks the stage had brought for her. Of course Mr. Page was not there to procure either checks or tickets, and she must manage for herself. It was a new experience, for it so happened that she had never travelled alone before in her life.

"Good morning, Miss Asbury." "Good morning, Miss Helen," said one voice after another, till it seemed as if half Quinnebasset was at her elbow. She was not going alone, after all.

"O dear!" thought she, her heart full of both laughter and tears, as the gallant Pitkin Jones appropriated her to himself, on the shady side of the car, and began to make profuse apologies for not attending to her trunks, though he had the baggage and final destination of at least five other lone females on his mind.

"O dear! if I could only be let alone to laugh and cry it out by myself!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT ST. LOUIS.

"How bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes." — *Shakespeare.*

St. Louis, Sept. 3.

DEAR HOME PEOPLE: Thanks for your despatch yesterday in answer to mine. You know that I am here safely; and now I'll tell you a few particulars.

We were five days on the way, and Mr. and Mrs. Pardee were very kind, but so deeply in love that I verily believe I might have slipped out of the cars "at any station on the line," and I should not have been missed. At Albany we took in another teacher, who is the wisest woman I ever beheld. She began instantly to talk Huxley and Spenser, and evolution and protoplasm, and asked me if I was interested in "molecular action?" I told her "No; it was as blind to me as the animal it was named for." It was a joke, for of course I know what *molecular* means, after all the science we've been reading this summer; but Miss Poindexter thought I was in earnest, and peered at me through her intellectual blue spectacles as if I were an "evolving" worm, without even the rudiments of

brains. She speaks all the live languages, and most of the dead ones, wears her hair in short twists that haven't evolution enough to curl more than half-way round, is very stiff and pretty, glistens like a silver poplar in a new Japanese silk, — but, O dear! she is so learned! Why is it that gazing over spectacle-rims gives one such a look of wisdom? She must have cracked the great nut of the world long ago, and picked out the meat; but she isn't so very old — only twenty-eight, perhaps.

"So you teach drawing?" said she. "I suppose it requires very little brain-force, but it is something I have never learned. I have a head for the sciences — not for the arts."

"What do you teach?" asked I, quite overawed.

"Ancient history, Greek literature, and geology."

I wondered she should try to keep up a conversation with me, but she did; she talked incessantly. At the end of the second day I understood it.

"You must think I am very social, but the truth is, never yet have I found any one so stupid or so ignorant that I could not learn something from conversing with them," said she.

"Thank you, Miss Poindexter," said I, and I had a feeling of humble gratitude such as that little mouse must have had when he gnawed the net, and set the noble lion free. Then she went on to question me about the State of Maine, but had "evolved an idea of it out of her own consciousness," which was very disagreeable indeed. It was so benighted, she said. No books worth reading; no schools worth mentioning. Of course the people were illiterate; and what

could we have there to eat? She talked, and she talked, and she talked, while I grew angrier every minute, and cut my answers as short as I could.

"You appear to be tired," said the learned lady.

"Excuse me, Miss Poindexter, I am only tired of hearing my native state berated."

"You don't mean to say you have that sort of sensitiveness, Miss Asbury? Now, that is really too narrow! Why, I am broad as the universe," said she, waving her stiff little hands. "You may say what you like of New York — that is my native state."

I told her I was greatly obliged, but had only lived in New York two years, and couldn't be supposed to know much about it. (That's a joke! She was never in Maine!)

Well, we reached St. Louis at noon yesterday. I should like it better without the dust, but I mean to be "broad," and not mind trifles. Mr. De Witt, the principal of the seminary, called on me at once. He is very gentlemanly, and did not frighten me at all. He says the school is flourishing, but I have not seen it yet; shall go in Monday morning. There are six teachers now, and one hundred and fifty pupils — more than the usual number; and I cannot board with the principal's family as I expected. But I have no reason to find fault with the place provided; it is far more elegant than I had a right to look for. Mr. De Witt would not allow his teachers to have second-rate board, but he manages the terms to suit himself, as the landlady, Mrs. Tasker, is greatly indebted to him for many favors. She has seen better days, and has saved from the wreck a large quantity of silver; and Miss Poindexter as-

sures me it is genuine — cake-basket, ice-pitcher, and all; but I'm so "narrow" that I don't believe it.

Miss Poindexter is to board here too. Rejoice with me, for my mind is in a fair way to become evolved to a "beautiful unfolding."

Love untold to every soul of you; and tell cousin Morris I will answer his letter when my head stops spinning. Good by.

HELEN.

The message to cousin Morris was added just before she dropped the letter into the mail, for a note had come from him, saying, —

"My precious Helen, have I done anything to offend you? Tell me at once; I cannot bear this suspense."

Then Helen sat down to think.

"There, wasn't that doing pretty well? No tears on the paper, and my hand never once trembled. Morris will ask, 'Have you heard from Helen?' and they will show him the letter; but he'll be none the wiser regarding my state of mind — not he. Morris Lynde, I impeach you for high trifling! You trifled with me — you certainly did! Hush! what am I saying? I look at it in so many lights that I get confused. He meant no wrong; it was I that was blind, and I should have been blind to this day, if Delia Liscom hadn't helped me with her quizzing-glass. Delia, I thank you! I'm not going to 'eat my heart' for any man, more particularly my sister's lover! I'll write him by and by, when I get ready, and tell him I am not offended — how could he have fancied such a thing? I only wished to save him the trouble of taking me to Poonoosac,

when Mr. Page was going, and had offered me a ride. Poor, demented Mr. Page! I'll write like a good, friendly icicle, if there is such a thing. No, that wouldn't do; he would detect the change in a moment — and he mustn't, he mustn't! Ah me! what has become of my enthusiasm, my interest in life? Nothing seems worth while now; but I must make believe I care, and by and by perhaps I shall care. But I do hate shams. There, now, there's that rose — it has been standing in that vase all day, making believe smile. See, it expresses what it doesn't feel — a sense of beauty and content. 'Aren't you tired of keeping up appearances, ma'am?'"

And Helen flung the rose out of the window. Then she took up her pen again, and wrote out the whole state of the case to her bosom friend, beginning, "Something has happened to me, Di."

Did she mean to send the letter across the ocean, at the risk of its falling into papa Cary's hands? No; she had fancied at the moment that she would send it; but second thought told her this was unwise. It was a relief to free her mind to Di, even though she destroyed the letter afterwards. It was not the first time she had done such a thing, and it would not be the last. Sympathy is sweet; but there are some troubles which are best borne alone.

> "Life hath sorrows, which, unspoken,
> The resolvéd heart may dare;
> But have words the silence broken,
> Broken is the strength to bear."

She wrote it all — put her whole heart into it; then

deliberately tore the four sheets into inch pieces, and stuffed them into the "morning-glory stove."

This was the letter she really sent a few days afterwards: —

DEAR DI: Thanks for yours of the 8th. Now I'll make a safety-valve of you, as usual, and tell you the disagreeable things which I don't like to write to home friends.

Firstly, this is a genteel boarding-house, and my new alpaca looks poor-relations-y, sweeping against the fine dresses that appear in the dining-room.

Secondly, the food is so rich that I've already had two sick headaches and a half. This is a new fault in a boarding-house, and I don't understand it, for there are signs of rigid economy in various other respects; and Mrs. Tasker has those little twinkling eyes that seem to be looking for money. She is half English and half French, and her table is neither one nor the other. What would I give for some of Thurzy's yeast bread? Do you like little baby pigs half baked, and sprinkled with sweet marjoram and thyme? I don't. If I had the heart to make a pun, I should say I wished piggy-wiggy could have had the "time" given him while he was in the oven, for then he might have come out brown instead of white. Do you like things hot with spices, and at the same time so fresh that no amount of salt can season them? Nor I, either. You know what the schoolboy said about salt: "It is one of those things that if you leave 'em out, things don't taste good."

Thirdly, I don't fancy Mrs. Tasker. She thinks too

much of outside appearances, I judge. Isn't it queer that the adverb oftenest on her lips is "seemingly," or "apparently"?

Fourthly, Miss Poindexter rooms with me. A very elevating and instructive companion; but she will evolve me to death with her learned talk, talk, talk; and she puts cade oil on her head at night, that seems to my uneducated nose precisely like tar. But how can I get away from her? for she came before I did, and it was very "broad" in her to accept a room-mate at all, more especially one from the wilds of Maine! I can't say a word to Mrs. Tasker, for not only is the house overflowing, but she "seemingly" looks on Miss Poindexter as a superior being — and so do I myself; indeed, that is my chief objection to her.

As for my class, I like it very well, and try to put my whole heart into it; but I am downright homesick, and have to work every minute out of school to keep my courage up. Work! — what a blessing it is! When Adam wiped his forehead the first time before eating his bread, I just wonder if he didn't feel a little satisfaction in it. And I tell you I've been thinking, if everybody were happy in this world, there wouldn't be so much work done. Did you ever think of that?

And now I come to the "strictly confidential," which I've been dreading all the while. You ask me what I think of Mr. Salloway. I think if the Lord had meant him to marry Diantha Cary, he would have made him worthy of her. O, don't hesitate a moment. Cast him away from you at once and forever. You say you can't. Yes, you can. You say I have never loved, and don't know how to pity you. Well, dear, I can guess it is

hard. I suppose we women were all made alike, weren't we? — made to care more for being loved than for anything else in the world? And when this sort of idolatry creeps into the heart, it is like tearing up a strong tree by the roots, to get it out. But, Di, with God's help you can do it; really, you must, you must! Life is hard, O, it is so hard! If there is anything particularly good, anything we desire with our whole hearts, it is certain that we mustn't have it. Maybe you'll think this is morbid, owing to pound cake; but if I'd eaten toasted cheese and mince pie, I should have said the same. Life is hard; but we must brace ourselves up to bear it. Di, forgive me for saying it, but it is debasing to love an unprincipled man — it is wicked, and I shan't let you do it. Think of something else; that's the way I should manage if I had any trouble to throw off. Look at all the wonders, and keep yourself tired and busy.

There, I've finished my preachment, and, as uncle Charles says before dismissing the congregation, "I leave the subject with you."

And now for the other confidential crumb. You hinted strange things in your letter, Di. What have you ever seen, or what have I said or written, that could make you suspect there was more than a cousinly friendship between Morris Lynde and myself? For there is not — there never was, there never will be. I may tell you of his engagement, one of these days, to some one you have heard of, so you may prepare for a surprise. For my part, I shall never marry, as I think I have said to you before. People can live worthy lives without love, Di, — don't you believe it? Come and

see me after I have earned a snug little fortune by my pencil and brush. Come and see me pour out tea for my nephews and nieces; and be sure you bring your husband with you, for I shall want to hear you say that he whispered to you, "Pity that woman never married, she is such a capital cook!"

There, I've wasted too much time on nonsense, and must go to work on my picture. It is ten o'clock at night, but I can paint very well by gas-light; and fortunately it doesn't disturb Miss Poindexter, who likes to sit up even longer than I do, improving her mind, to say nothing of the time it takes to *cade* her head, and mummify it in silk bandages.

Good by, dear. I direct to Lausanne, Suisæ Porte Restante, hoping you will receive this letter some time. Think of me now and then, when you see castles and pictures. Adieu.

HELEN.

And how fared it all this while with Sharly? Weeks passed before Helen heard anything from her, except bits of talk in her mother's letters, written with that same "spattering" gold pen, about nothing in particular; but one day there came a confidential scrap.

"What would you think, dearest sister, if your little Sharly should be really and truly engaged? Tell me, — are you perfectly willing? Am I too young? We can't be quite settled and happy till we know our Helen gives her consent!"

Helen immediately replied,

"Yes, darling; whatever makes you happy, will make me happy, too. Write at once, and tell me all about it."

Then she dropped her pen, saying to herself, —

"It is coming. I did not think it would be so soon. Ache on, poor heart! nobody minds you. — Beg pardon, Miss Poindexter; what were you saying about cosmic force?"

"I was merely speaking of the absurdity of prayer, and alluding to Professor Tyndall's state of mind when he was on the Alps."

"Well, I'm glad I didn't hear you, then, for I devoutly believe in a heavenly Father, for my part. Why, if I didn't, Miss Pointdexter, I should cry out with horror, and I'm sure I wouldn't try to live!"

"She's a very handsome girl when she is roused," thought the teacher of geology, as Helen walked out of the room; "pity she's so narrow."

Ah, but Helen needed all her "narrowness" just now. She was at the age when we consider our own personal happiness of the first importance; indeed, it takes the most of us a great while to outgrow that way of thinking. She was not old enough to know that —

> "Nothing can be withdrawn from us,
> That we have any need to keep,"

for she thought she did need this thing that was withdrawn. She only knew that her sky had grown black, and she supposed, as all young people do, that her sun had gone down forever. What could help her in this

strait but to fold her hands and say, during that long night, —

"Thy will be done, though in my own undoing"?

She did say it, and it soothed her.

"And if only one of us can be happy, let it be Sharly," she added, with a rested smile, which all Miss Poindexter's philosophy could never have summoned to her lips.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MYSTIFIED.

"What am I, that I should love her,
But for feeling of the pain?"

HELEN'S letters became less and less frequent, and the "home people" began to wonder a little.

"I don't understand it," said Sharly, every time the children returned from the post office empty-handed. "Helen used to write such entertaining letters when she was away. I wish you could see some I had the first year she was at boarding-school, Morris; but now all we get is little scraps scribbled off in a hurry. I say it's too bad!"

"I'm afraid she is over-working," returned cousin Morris, who had been more chagrined than he liked to confess by his own brief correspondence with Helen. It was useless for him to write her: she either paid no heed to his letters, or answered them jocosely, just as she could snatch a moment from school duties. In vain Mr. Lynde pondered over her dainty little notes; they were unsatisfactory in the extreme.

"It is like her to be serio-comic at times, but she is never persistently so. She was always in earnest with me whenever I wished it; now it is impossible to draw

anything from her but this airy jesting. I can't imagine what ails her," thought the young man, reading over her second letter for the forty-second time. It never occurred to him that *he* could be in any way at fault.

"Auntie," said he, throwing himself on the sofa beside Mrs. Asbury, "I want you to help me with your woman's wit. What keeps Helen at arm's length from me? We have had the most delightful friendship, and there has been no jar that I know of. In anybody else I should call it caprice, but in Helen —"

"My dear boy," said his aunt, laying her hand on his forehead, and looking into his eyes, "will you allow me to answer your question by asking another? Has there ever been any romance between you and Helen?"

"Aunt Katharine!"

A girl could not have blushed more beautifully than he at this home thrust, — but he did not turn away his eyes. Was there just a grain of truth then in Thurzy's sweeping remark, "Men don't mind such things; the conscience is feminine?"

"No, aunt, never. Friendship is one thing — love is another."

Mrs. Asbury looked into the clear eyes which met hers so frankly, and hesitated before speaking again.

"Morris, there is one thing I do know: love and friendship lie very near together in some minds. Indeed, I have seen a few highly organized people who could hardly distinguish the difference. Pardon me, my boy, but I have fancied it might be so with you."

"Did you? Not in regard to our Helen?" said the young man, with another girlish blush.

"Yes, of course in regard to Helen. I could not think seriously of you and Sharly."

"Because she is too much of a child yet? Is that your meaning?"

"Because I have never supposed there was any affinity between you."

"Auntie, look at me."

A needless request, for her eyes had not stirred from his face.

"And tell me candidly why you have thought such a thing of me."

"Such a thing as what?"

"That I should aspire towards Helen."

"Is it then so very strange, Morris? I think, for my part, there are few girls more lovable."

"'White, radiant, spotless, exquisitely pure.'"

"Well, what then?"

"I fling the words back at you, aunt Katharine: 'what then?' The stars are fair, but we have no power to call them down from the sky — have we?"

"You certainly talk like a man in love, Morris?"

"Do I? And with Helen, you think?"

A new idea, and apparently not a very pleasing one, flashed across Mrs. Asbury's mind.

"Sharly is a bewitching little creature, Morris; but, somehow, that is not what I should have expected."

"And why not?" said Morris, with averted head, taking up his aunt's work-basket, and entangling his fingers in a skein of silk.

"Because — Ah, give that silk to me — I did not think it, because there are some thoughts which come to us naturally, and some which come only when they are put into our heads."

"Lucid! So you naturally thought of Helen; but now you think of Sharly, because the idea has been put into your head. Pray who put it there, aunt?"

"Morris, you're a very provoking boy. I suppose you must have put it there yourself, for it has certainly come since I have been talking with you."

"Yet I don't remember to have spoken Sharly's name." Another raid upon the work-basket.

"Perhaps not; I don't know where the suggestion originated. But, Morris," and here her voice took the rising inflection, "Sharly is an extremely fascinating girl, more likely to turn a young man's head than Helen is."

"Auntie, you're trying to probe me!" said the nephew, looking up with a roguish smile.

"I might as well try to probe an artesian well with a knitting-needle then."

"Aunt Katharine, I'll be as frank with you as this: Sharly *is* a bewildering little fairy, and woe to the young man whose heart is not encased in triple armor."

"Ah? Indeed!"

"We men are irresponsible creatures. We can't depend upon what we will do," went on Morris, rising hastily and overturning the work-basket.

"There now, I will pick them all up. But, aunt Katharine, you shouldn't try me too far."

"I know it." She stooped and kissed him gravely. If he really meant all his words seemed to imply, he had sunk a little in her esteem. What? Prefer Sharly to Helen? Why, that was what any common man would do, and she had given him credit for superior discernment. She did not mean to let him know

she pitied him, but he detected a little pathos in her voice.

"Aunt Katharine, you and I have been bantering long enough. Could you think seriously that I would offer love to either of your daughters?"

"It seems to me very natural," replied Mrs. Asbury, looking more than ever puzzled.

"I'm in a hard place!" exclaimed Morris, suddenly beginning to pace the floor. "Aunt Kate, I'm in a hard place!"

"Morris, you're a dark riddle to-day. Wait a moment. You don't mean — you can't mean — *that?*"

"Yes, just that."

"My dear boy!"

"Do you suppose a man can forget a thing that is woven into every tissue of his being, that beats with his heart's blood?"

Here Sharly came into the room, keeping step to an imaginary waltzing tune; and so for that time the conversation ended, not to be resumed unless Mrs. Asbury should make another special effort. Should she do it?

Perhaps that old trouble had really taken such deep hold of him that he would never think of marrying; or perhaps he might have a growing fancy for Sharly. She longed to know; yet it was always hard to approach Morris when he chose not to be confidential. He seemed the most amiable and yielding of mortals, but she was well aware that he was as "set" as the famous "shaking stone," which a child can move, but fifty men cannot overturn. She decided, on the whole, to repress her curiosity.

The next news from Helen was more disappointing

than ever. Merely a half-sheet of note paper, with the hastily written words, "I have so much work to do that I find very little time to write. Won't it answer if I send a newspaper every week? Let me off, and don't scold, my dear, dear friends."

"What possesses her?" cried the twins. "Not write?" said Sharly. "What's a paper? Who cares for a paper?"

"Might get Miss What's-her-name to be buttoning her boots for her while she writes, to save time," suggested Vic. "This note looks as if 'twas written on a cat's back."

"May I see it?" said Morris, and took it to the window, for the sun was setting. He was gone so long that Mrs. Asbury asked with some anxiety, "What do you see in it?"

"It is a poor specimen of penmanship," he replied, evasively. And when the lamps were lighted, he examined the letter again.

"Now, Morris, do tell us what this means," said Sharly, going up to him with such a beseeching look that a man must have had a heart of stone who could have helped trying to comfort her. "It just wrings my heart," said she, half crying, to think something may have happened to that dear unselfish girl. If she is sick she won't tell of it for fear we shall worry."

"But you do worry, and you don't know yet that she isn't perfectly well," said Morris, with a reassuring smile, which Mrs. Asbury thought was unnecessarily tender. "And she may repent and write, after all."

But she did not. Three days passed, and then came a St. Louis paper directed by Helen most cer-

tainly, though she had fallen off strangely in her handwriting. Three days more and another; the wrappers each time undergoing a keen scrutiny from Mr. Lynde, who seemed to have some fancied clue to the mystery, though he did not say what it was.

"Busy? That's no excuse for her," said aunt Marian, entering inopportunely, one evening, as Morris and Sharly had their heads together over the third newspaper; "you needn't tell me she couldn't find time to write. That child is sick! It's a strange climate, and she went too early. I only wish I had been consulted!"

"I wish you had, auntie," said Sharly, with a look of deference which Mrs. Hinsdale found very sweet to her soul. But why need the child stand with her hand resting on Mr. Lynde's arm? She should be obliged to write Mrs. Asbury a note if he staid in town long.

"Well, Helen is there now, and we all think something is wrong," continued she. "Why can't somebody go to St. Louis and look into it? Mr. Lynde, *you* might go as well as not."

"Yes," replied Mr. Lynde, quietly, "I am going."

The children gave little screams of delight; but aunt Marian actually felt chagrined at this prompt acquiescence.

"Wish I had held my tongue. His mind was made up before I spoke, but now I shall be held responsible. And I don't know whether it's Helen or Sharly he cares for; I positively don't know."

CHAPTER XXIX.

PENCIL SKETCHES.

"Sorrow and silence are strong."

THE fears of the family were well founded. There was good reason for the sudden dropping off of Helen's letters; and, aided by a hint from his past knowledge of her, Mr. Lynde had truly divined the trouble.

A few extracts from her letters to Diantha about this time will explain everything. These letters were written in pencil, each line folded in with two creases, like a game of Consequence, or crambo verses. The words were irregular, but quite legible. She called them "Pencil Sketches."

Oct. 5. (This was the first date.)

Dear Di: I am not dead; did you think it? Have to speak in short gasps, like a person out of breath: will explain. — You know I had a drawing-class; tried to paint a picture, too; worked evenings; gaslight, bad for eyes; didn't notice it; eyes ached; never minded. Suddenly, on the street, a pain came fierce and sharp; almost fainted; went into druggist's; called for hartshorn; sat down; felt better; returned to boarding-house; no dinner; afraid of light in dining-room; dropped curtains in chamber.

Pain came again; horrible. Bandaged eyes with scarf. Miss Poindexter suggested "a doctor;" Mrs. Tasker echoed "doctor;" Miss Poindexter said "Dr. Hallock." (He is studying eyes; engaged to Miss P.; came from Boston; knows everything.) Then, of course, Mrs. Tasker said "Dr. Hallock," too. I was willing; they called him in; all thought I was going blind.

He came; examined eyes; said lashes irritated them. I asked "Why? Always had eyelashes; never been the least trouble to me before." He squared his shoulders; looked daggers; said they "must come out." "What? Not eyelashes?" "Yes — half of them." "Would that cure the pain?" "Yes." "Well," said I, "I'll think about it, sir."

But I didn't and couldn't think. "*He* knows," said Miss Poindexter. "It *seems* as if he must know," said Mrs. Tasker. But I wasn't sure of it. Eyes went on aching; sun went on glaring; blazed through blinds like a Drummond light.

Doctor came next day; came day after; kept coming. Miss Poindexter said I was "ready." Mrs. Tasker said I "*seemed* to be ready." Mrs. Kazar, one of the boarders, told me she knew a case worse than mine cured by parting with eyelashes. I longed for Dr. Prescott; ought to have sent for Mr. De Witt; didn't think of it. Dr. Hallock had brought some chloroform; I accidentally caught a sniff; that roused me. "He who steals my purse steals trash," but I won't part with my brains. Sat upright; said, "I'm ready, if you'll take away that bottle!" Wasn't I demented? Yes, I think so; I always consider and consider, then end by doing something rash; that's my way.

Doctor took tweezers and began; nearly killed me; didn't care for that; but when he had pulled out every other winker of my right eyelid, I came to my senses. "Stop!" I cried. "It is the nerve of my eye that aches; it isn't the lashes! Stop, sir, I entreat!"

But he wouldn't. He was like Shylock. "I'll have my bond; I will not hear thee speak."

Then I caught his hand, and held it fast; I snatched away the tweezers. That offended him. I stood my ground. I had saved one whole eye and half of the other, but I had lost one friend forever. The doctor bowed himself out and never returned. I had lost two friends, for Miss Poindexter followed; I had lost three friends, for Mrs. Tasker went next.

Oct. 8. — Have combed my hair by sense of feeling; will resume pencil-sketch, otherwise letter. It ought to be as full of dates as a palm-tree. Keep it for "take-up work," as aunt Filura knits her socks.

Well, here I am with the responsibility of my own eyes; and most ungrateful eyes do they prove. Never call them "faithful" any more, Di Cary! Parting with lashes did more harm than good. Felt cross, and called Dr. Hallock "Shylock." Miss Poindexter had begun to freeze before, but after that she froze solid. She is as "broad as the universe," and has "no temper," but she hardly speaks, and has taken another room; I'm so lonesome; want her now; want to hear her talk, even if it's only to twit me of "breaking the laws of health, and over-using my eyes." Didn't she break laws too? Didn't she use cheap, small-print German dictionary, and stick it almost into the gas-flame? She

needn't talk to me! (And, alas, she very seldom does!)

I'm in dark room, all alone; green shade over eyes; Mrs. Kazar made the shade. Nobody ever comes near me but St. Agnes, the cook. She runs in before she begins to serve the meals; brings my food, for of course I can't appear at table. It tires my eyes even to look at my plate, and blessed St. Agnes cuts up my meat. She doesn't understand the new school stoical philosophy, or she wouldn't do it; she'd leave me alone to suffer the penalty of a broken law. O, Di, if there wasn't anything but cosmic force, and evolution, and molecular action in this world! If God was only a law-giver and a law-sustainer, and had shut us up in ourselves to bear our troubles the best we could, why, we might as well cut loose and drop it all. But, thank Heaven, he that made the laws is our Father, and pities us like children even when we go astray. He converts our very punishments into blessings. O, Di, I do believe this, though I often forget it. I am very much like sister Bumpus, as she described herself last spring — "I get religion every once in a while; but it don't last me but a few minutes."

The girls of my drawing-class have called; nice girls. I'm ashamed to let them know how keenly I enjoy their visits; it seems like begging for more. I even love the thump of the scrub-girl's broom in the passage, the dainty tap of Mrs. Tasker's fingers on the door, for she makes duty-calls sometimes. But it is only St. Agnes who asks me to lift my green shade.

"O, Miss, how white you grow!" she says; "you look like you never saw the sun."

And I haven't seen it for weeks. It is a great blazing, dazzling, torturing ball of fire. But how I used to love it!

There, Di, now you understand the whole thing. Class stopped; picture stopped; eyes stopped; board running on. What will be the end, and when? O, Thou, who didst set the rainbow in the sky, give me hope! I have expected to be well to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow; but three weeks of to-morrows haven't set Rowley Bowley where he was before. Mr. De Witt says I ought to see a New York oculist; still he thinks I can go back to school in a month. Will wait two months for me. Has heard of a similar case, and so has everybody; and everybody suggests a new remedy; but only one thing has done me any good, and that is dry earth — a wee bag of it laid on my eyes at night.

Now, Di, what to do? Can't travel to Maine blindfold without any little dog to lead me; you see I can't — don't you? I want the dear people at home to know how it is with me; but it would break their hearts, and do me no good. Better bear it in silence. Besides, mother, or somebody else, might start to come after me, and she mustn't; can't afford it. So I dare not divulge, and have given up writing home, for my handwriting would betray me in a minute. I send newspapers, and they scold me for neglecting them. Mrs. Kazar kindly reads me their letters. — Here St. Agnes brought in my dinner — oyster-patties heavy with butter, and mince-pie fairly floating in suet. "O, dear!" said I. And then I found out the secret of this richness: Mrs. Tasker thinks such food is more profitable, because the board-

ers can't eat so much! Magnificent meanness! I have sent to beg an allowance of codfish and crackers. I can't risk becoming ill.

Well, well, these pencil sketches are rather mixed. Thought I'd let you know I know it. My intellect isn't impaired, ma'am, not in the least. I direct again to your Paris address, and wait in the patience of hope for a reply. None of your condolences, Miss Pink; not a word of 'em! Much as I can do now to keep my upper lip respectably stiff.

Your aff. friend,

HELEN.

("Aff." stands for afflicted!)

P. S. I was resolved not to say a word about Mr. Salloway; but the pitiful cry in your last letter, "I don't get over it, Helen," keeps ringing in my ears. Well, your will is steadfast; that's the point. No matter, Di, how much the leaves of a tree may tremble, if the tree itself only stands firm. You've said, "I will not," and that's all that can be expected of you yet. Don't suffer any more than you're really obliged to, though, for the man doesn't deserve it. After all, it isn't as bad as caring for a really noble, good person, who doesn't care for you; do you think it is? That would indeed be a calamity, for there would be shame in it. Your love was not won unsought, so please hold up your head like a lady. Look at the Parisian wonders, and report them all to me. I care more for you than Mr. S. ever did!

P. S. Number Two. I suppose there's no harm in telling you that Sharly and cousin Morris are engaged.

It is all settled, but they haven't told mother yet. I wanted to give you a hint of this before, but was not quite sure of it myself. It seemed to hang in the balance when I came away. Sharly is wondrous happy; her pen seems dripping with joy — darling child! Aren't you and I glad for her?

Yours in a "green gloom,"

HELEN.

CHAPTER XXX.

PLEASANT SURPRISE.

HELEN sat alone in her chamber, trying to warm her benumbed fingers at the morning-glory stove.

"It should be called the evening primrose, for it never wakes up before night; and this time I believe it's really dead," said she, pushing back her green shade, and opening the stove-door. "O, no; there's a breath of life here yet. It reminds me of Delia Liscom's favorite picture — a mass of inky black, with here and there a red streak." Helen smiled faintly, but the recollection of Delia Liscom was not a pleasure, and she drew down her shade again with the resolute thought, "Ellie won't suffer."

"If I shiver so in November, what am I going to do next winter? Wonder if the trouble isn't in my heart? I tried on principle to freeze up one corner of it before I left home, and now the whole organ is growing numb. I'm naturally fond of folks, and folks don't come near me. I like to talk, and there isn't even a cat to hear what I say. Think, think, thinking, all day, and all night. Thinking the same thoughts over and over tries and hurts your mind, just as it hurts your lungs to breathe exhausted air. Ah, if I were only at home! I'd have Vic read to me, and Theresa boil me apple

dumplings, and baby-boy sit in my lap patting poor Helen's cheek. And then the neighbors would drop in — Hush, Helen Asbury, some one else would drop in as well as the neighbors. Shut out that picture instantly! There now, the old heartache is coming back, just because you forgot your principles, and stooped to pity yourself. If you can't be happy, I advise you to be strong."

There was a light tap at the door.

"A gentleman down stairs would like to see Miss Asbury," said the landlady, in apologetic tones, as if she knew the message was an annoyance, and she was sorry to deliver it.

"Mr. De Witt, of course."

"O, no, a stranger."

"Did he give his name?"

"No; he didn't seem to see the necessity, and I couldn't seem to urge it, you know."

Helen had risen from her chair.

"How did he look, Mrs. Tasker?"

"I didn't see him; I only overheard him talking to Barbara in the hall; and then I thought I'd come myself, and find out whether you'd like to have me ask him up here, or whether you'd go down stairs into the parlor?"

"If there is a good fire there, I think I will go down, Mrs. Tasker," said Helen, gathering her shawl about her shoulders, and groping towards the door.

"Poor, dear soul, it's too bad; but the girls don't seem to get time to take care of your room. And now I come to look at it, it does appear to need sweeping. How ashamed I should have felt to have a stranger

come into it! Here, dear, give me your hand, and you needn't use your eyes in going down stairs."

Helen took the offered forefinger, and felt like a baby learning to walk.

"Dear Mrs. Tasker," said she, as they reached the parlor door, "please let me go in alone. I do not wish to shock any one."

But the shock had already fallen.

"She is growing blind, sir," had been Barbara's reply to Mr. Lynde, "and the doctor has most put her eyes out into the bargain."

This was appalling news to be thrown in a man's face at the end of a two thousand miles' journey; and Mr. Lynde had withdrawn to the back parlor to recover himself, after the usual masculine method, by pacing the floor.

"Take a seat on the sofa, Miss Asbury, and I'll go and find him," said the obsequious landlady.

Helen sat down with a feeling of unreality, having had a secret doubt all along whether this visitor were actually possessed of flesh and blood. But at the sound of her name, Mr. Lynde immediately came forward.

"Morris!" cried she, knowing his step, and springing up eagerly from the sofa. "O, Morris, Morris!"

Her first impulse was to throw her arms around his neck; and she even wondered for a moment why it should be wrong to do it. She had so longed for her friends! and here was one who stood in place of the whole family, only dearer and better than all. It was not that she would have taken what belonged to Sharly; she wanted nothing, claimed nothing; she simply

felt how very glad she was that he had come. Mrs. Tasker hurried out of the room with such a rustle, and flurry, and clicking of the door-latch, that there was no mistaking about her going; and Helen and Mr. Lynde were left to themselves. He could not but see how welcome he was, and it touched him.

"Poor Helen, poor child!" said he, in his tenderest voice, and put both hands on her shoulders.

Then something — she could not have told what; either the gladness that is always akin to pain, or the thought of Sharly coming just as she was quite forgotten — shook Helen from head to foot. She broke away from Mr. Lynde, and sank back upon the sofa. If she had seen his face then, she would have wondered at the deep emotion it betrayed; but when he broke the silence at last, it was by a jest: —

"Well, Helen, I thought you would be glad to see somebody from the rural districts; but you haven't even shaken hands with me yet."

"O, Morris, how did you happen to come?"

"A polite question, really! 'How did I happen to come?' I will make my apologies in due time; but first I would like to know how you happened to keep us all in the dark?"

"I have been in the dark myself," replied Helen, who had now ceased to tremble, and felt almost at ease with her cousin.

"Yes, dear, and thought we would not care to know it," said Mr. Lynde, in a voice that tried to be stern. "We are so cold and unfeeling, — mother and all of us, — that we don't mind what becomes of a stray lamb of the flock. Was that what you thought?"

"Don't scold, cousin Morris. It was so dreadful that I didn't want to tell anybody till it was well over; and now it seems as if it never would be over. O, dear!"

The "O, dear," was a great relief, but it "let her down" a little, and she began to tremble again.

Mr. Lynde, though extremely anxious to learn the exact state of the case, repressed all signs of curiosity, and went on in the same light vein: —

"I see you have buried your eyes like precious gems, and I shall want you to tell me, by and by, why you are so chary of them; but first I am going to talk a little myself. Do you know how long it is since I have seen you?"

"Three months."

"Three months, three days, and two hours, Mademoiselle. I keep an almanac in my heart."

"Do you? So do I; but my almanac says it has been half a cycle. Pray tell me, is everybody well?"

"Everybody but Mrs. Page, I believe." Here Mr. Lynde bit his lip, and added playfully, "She is in a drooping, invalid state; not long for this world, unquestionably."

In point of fact, Mrs. Page was in a strange and alarming condition; but it did not seem either kind or necessary to tell Helen of it now.

"Don't be absurd, Morris," said Helen, with a faint smile. "I always know just what to expect of Mrs. Page; but firstly, how are mother and the baby?"

"Baby is lively, and your mother is full of business. She was making a pincushion when I left."

"A pincushion? She must be quite at leisure, then."

"O, no, it was a sofa-pillow; now I remember. And

the children are as fresh as roses; but they say they are pining for our Helen."

"What of — Theresa?"

Sharly's name had died unuttered.

"Theresa is nearly ready to go into the wilderness. Mr. Bangs's horse stands at your gate a great deal of the time, 'eating post-meat,' as Miss Bumpus expresses it; and whenever I see the man take off his hat at the door, it seems as if he did it to cool his head. Did you ever see such fiery hair? He gave Sharly a handful of tracts the other day."

"Did he? This is the first time you have mentioned Sharly," said Helen, folding her hands quietly. "How does she look? What is she doing?"

"She is as beautiful as ever, and sent so many messages that one head can't contain them all. Has she written much about herself of late?"

"Not much," replied Helen, huskily. "But you can say it all."

"What do you wish me to say? You will have to ask definite questions."

Helen felt grieved and surprised. Why should he be so reticent with her? She was ready to hear all, anything; could he doubt it? But as to asking definite questions, that was something impossible; he might tell her or not, as he chose.

Mr. Lynde saw by the wavering color in her cheeks that she was still agitated, and blamed himself for trying to divert her attention.

"It is almost an impertinence, when the poor girl can think of nothing but her misfortune. I may as well speak of it first as last," he thought.

"Well, Helen, your eyes are like the Southern States — are they? They have set up state sovereignty, and won't obey the federal head? Tell me how it happened, dear child; for, strange as it may seem, I do really feel interested to know."

Why did he speak so tenderly, with his whole heart in his words? It made it so difficult to answer him at once! O, it was dreadful that a person should have such a deluding voice, — a voice that says, "What I feel is for you, and only you," — when the real meaning is merely brotherly friendship. But Helen was too just to blame Mr. Lynde for what she believed to be quite involuntary.

"I will tell you all I know," said she, presently. "It is the spiritual part of my eye that has gone wrong; it is a little crazy — that is all."

"The nerve, you mean? And the vision is obscured somewhat?"

He waited breathlessly for the answer.

"O, no, not at all. I can see better than ever. I can almost see in the dark."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Mr. Lynde, springing up, and swinging his arms with uncontrollable emotion.

"Why, you did not think I was going blind?"

"By no means. The maid with a streak of coal on her cheek said something of the sort; but one does not believe such horrible stories without good proof."

"O, it was Barbara, the most tragic girl!"

"Helen, I pity you with all my soul; but you won't mind my rejoicing a little to find you can see? I would rather lose my own eyes than have you lose yours."

"My dear cousin Morris, it is too unearthly good of you to say that."

"Is it? I can't see why. But, Helen, if you will only drop that word cousin, I will be most grateful."

He had been the very one to suggest her using it at first, and Helen could not help thinking how times change, and men change with them. Now he wanted her to call him brother, of course, and she was about to do so, but remembered opportunely that it was hardly the thing, until he should request it himself; so she finished the sentence with "Morris" just above her breath.

"Thank you," said Mr. Lynde, taking her hand, and retaining it; "that is better, only I haven't the slightest objection to the little adjective of four letters, whenever it pleases you to use it. — And now, don't be discouraged about your eyes. I fancy they are just as my father's were once upon a time; and if so, all you need is rest and patience. May I look at the poor things?"

"Not for the world. They are unfit to be seen, for the fringe is all torn off the curtains."

Then Helen poured forth the whole story, Mr. Lynde listening with profound sympathy, till she came to the loss of the "fringe," when his indignation knew no bounds.

"The dastardly knave! The unscrupulous quack! Is he still at large? Where does he live?"

"O, he can't give me back my eye-lashes, and it is of no use wasting breath over him; but I do like to hear you rave about it, Morris. You can't imagine how refreshing it is to have somebody care," said Helen, leaning back with a rested look.

"You dear, patient child, how much you have needed your friends!"

"Yes, sadly; I don't believe I'm very strong-minded, for I don't like to bear my troubles alone."

"I hope not. It is a hard, cold nature that chooses to stand by itself, like a rock beaten by storms. But, that is the very point I don't understand, for you have borne this trouble alone, and apparently from choice. Can you tell me the reason, Helen?"

No; she could tell him only a small part of the reason.

"You know it would be impossible to travel home alone with one's eyes bandaged, Morris."

"I would have come after you, my dear."

"You? O, I had no right to expect that; I could not ask it. And then I thought all the while I should soon be well, and it was cruel to distress my friends."

"Helen, you have wounded me deeply. I am not sure I shall ever forgive you."

There it was again, that delusive tone which said, "It is you, and you alone, who were able thus to wound me;" when really it only meant a general kindliness and pity towards any one in trouble. Helen could not bear it any longer.

"Morris, I want to show you the picture I was painting when my eyes failed me. Wait a minute, and I will go up stairs for it."

"Can you really walk about by yourself?"

"O, yes, all over the house. It must have shocked you to see Mrs. Tasker leading me in, and I meant to tell you she only did it to show me off," said Helen, tripping out of the room almost as lightly as ever, and returning soon with the picture.

It was a tree-covered mountain, sloping down to the sea, half in shadow, half in a warm burst of sunshine, with a drift of gray, watery clouds hanging over it, and blotting out a few of the trees.

"It is named 'Solitude,'" said she. "Will you tell me just what you think of it?"

"It is the best thing you have ever done. It was conceived with a true and loving spirit, and is wrought with remarkable skill. I did not think you could do so well, Helen. Those blue-grays and gray-yellows blend admirably."

"I am proud to hear you praise me," said Helen, half sadly. "Perhaps I shall never paint another picture, but it helps my self-respect to think I have some ability. Do you know I have just found out what life means, Morris? It means giving up."

"Let me count your pulse, Helen; you must be sick. I had the same dark view of life two years ago, but it passed away as I grew better."

"No," said Helen, steadily, "this is nothing I shall forget. You needn't consider me morbid, for I am not. I am only beginning to understand that people get just the discipline they need, and that I need the discipline of giving up, and so it is sent to me."

"To cure you of selfishness," said Morris, with a smile, which would have flattered her too much if she had seen it.

"Yes, it is all right, for there is nothing I hate so much as giving up," said Helen, hastening to change the conversation. — "Tell me something more about home, something about the children."

"Let me see. Bel is teasing to have her hair cut

"She broke away from Mr Lynde, and sank back upon the sofa." — Page 292.

off; and the twins' heads look as if they had jumped into a bramble-bush — the latest style, I suppose; but you will see them soon for yourself. You are going home with me, of course."

"I? O, no, no; that is not to be thought of," exclaimed Helen, hastily; for in her intense preoccupation this idea had never occurred to her.

But it was the only reasonable course. What else could she do? She saw it all in a moment, even before Mr. Lynde had had time to speak. She knew how it would be; she must go home, and become the very thing she loathed and despised — a burden upon her family. "It is giving up again," thought she, pressing her lips together hard; "will there ever be any end to giving up?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

JOURNEY HOME.

"Some say the king is dead, others say he is not; but for my part I believe neither the one nor the other."

"HOW kind you are, cousin Morris, and how beautiful it is that you can take care of me," said Helen, gratefully, as she sat in the cars next day, beside Mr. Lynde, homeward bound, and closely veiled.

"Thank you, Helen; I would not mind going twice as far for the sake of hearing you say that."

Helen did not speak again for a minute or two. There was something in Mr. Lynde's manner that reminded her how happy Sharly must be. Of course he said such things as that to her, only in a different way, more tenderly if possible. She wondered just how he did speak to Sharly; she thought she should like to know.

"There is going to be sunshine all the way along on Sharly's life. I can seem to see the dazzle of it with my eyes shut. I never shall 'stand between her and the sun' any more. Dear little Sharly, I'm so glad she is happy!"

But the gladness did not seem to be of the ordinary sort, for it thrilled Helen's heart with a feeling akin to pain. It was beautiful to see Sharly enveloped in light; but she who looked on was shut away by herself in the

dark. It was all right, and as Helen told herself again and again, she would not have had it otherwise — only — well, perhaps she could bear it better if Mr. Lynde were not quite so kind.

"Helen, I am very glad you said to me what you did a little while ago."

"What was that?"

"Why, that you liked to have me take care of you. That, and a few other little words you have spoken lately, are very precious to me, for they make me hope we are friends once more."

"Friends? Were we ever anything but friends? Why, what can you be thinking about, cousin Morris?"

"O, I think of nothing now; it's all far back in the past; we won't go hunting up ghosts — will we, Helen?"

"But, cousin Morris, you must mean something. One would think I had been offended with you. With *you?* Was ever anything so absurd?"

It did not occur to Helen that she was speaking to Mr. Lynde very differently from usual. It was true he had not yet announced to her his engagement with Sharly; but the fact was never out of her mind for a moment: it changed her whole manner, touching it with the warmth of a new relationship.

"Well, Helen, if you don't remember any ill feeling, I am sorry to have mentioned it. There was something odd in your manner just before you went away; that was all."

"Was there?" said Helen, faintly, conscious of blushing under the thick veil. — "Dear me, how can that man play on his harp when the cars are going at such a rate? Do you like that tune, cousin Morris?"

"Not particularly."

"Neither do I. It doesn't tell the truth. It says life is full of sunshine, and everybody is happy. Some music is true, you know, but that isn't."

There was a dreariness in Helen's tone of which she was quite unaware.

"My dear, I am afraid you are tired!"

"O, no, cousin Morris, not a bit of it. I've done nothing but rest for ever so long, and now I'm 'dreadfully rested,' like the little boy who went to school, and sat six hours on a bench."

Helen was laughing now. "Did you think something must trouble me, because I said the world wasn't all sunshine? I don't like the sun nowadays, you know. I think of taking a trip to Uranus, where they don't see him for twenty-three years at a time, and when they do see him he looks like a large star."

"May I go with you and carry a lantern?"

"O, yes, if it is a dark lantern."

"Helen," said Mr. Lynde, after a long pause, during which he was apparently taking a minute survey of the bell-rope.

"No, no, not yet!" thought the young girl, pressing her hands together under her cape. "I am not ready to hear it yet."

"Cousin Morris, is it beautiful, this part of the country through which we are riding?"

"Yes, but you wouldn't enjoy it, Helen, for it doesn't tell the truth any more than that man's harp over in the corner. It would be too bright for you to look at, and part of the brightness is a sort of false sunshine, made by the yellow leaves."

"Yes; but tell me how it looks, please."

"Well, it looks as if the trees were trying to write an allegory, and all their wondrous colors were a dream of heaven."

"Beautiful! Is there a river?"

"Yes — a sparkling river, and a thirsty island right in the middle of it, that seems longing to cool itself in the water. But, Helen —"

"What sort of trees?"

"Oaks and willows. The willows are less advanced than the others; they are an olive green."

"Yes, I know. Willows are the first to leaf out, and the last to leave off."

"But, Helen, I began to say to you —"

"Something about trees. Pray let me hear some more."

"More! There is one dead tree standing up straight and still, while all the other trees round it are sunning themselves. I think it is an oak, and has been blasted by lightning."

"Poor oak! it seems a pity it can't lie down and rest after it is dead," said Helen. "But there, I won't make you tell me any more, though it is very good; it is like eating the crumbs from a rich man's table. By the way," added she, before Mr. Lynde had time to speak, "I've often speculated about Lazarus. Seems to me he might have been just as happy as Dives if he'd only been thankful enough for the crumbs: did you ever think of that?"

"No, I never thought of it, but no doubt it is true!"

"Because, you know," continued Helen, "everybody can't be fortunate; whatever you lack somebody else

will have; so, on the whole, it's rather comfortable to be poor, for then you don't get more than your share of the good things."

"Well said, Helen! Seems to me it has made you very wise to bandage those eyes of yours. An old philosopher put his out that he might think more profoundly. I wonder if people who sit in darkness do really see more light than the rest of the world."

"No, they only see into themselves, and there it is pitch dark," said Helen, laughing a little; but as she said no more, there was a long silence, during which Mr. Lynde looked at her intently.

"Helen, there is something I would like to say to you, if you are ready to hear it."

"Certainly, O, certainly; but will you please go first and see if you can get me a drink of water?"

Like a flower after a breeze has passed over it, Helen had regained her balance by the time Mr. Lynde returned with the water.

"Helen, suppose a man is under a ban, — an innocent man, I mean, — has he any right to tell a woman he loves her?"

This was the question he asked, leaning over her as she drank from his silver travelling-cup. It was so different from what she had expected to hear, that it startled her, and a few drops of water trickled over the edge of the cup upon her dress.

"Under a ban, cousin Morris?"

"Yes, I have always wanted you to know that I did not get an honorable discharge from the army; but it was a long story, and I was afraid you would not understand."

"And I certainly do not understand," replied Helen, her eyes shining through the double veil like cloudy stars. "What is an honorable discharge?"

"It is a paper stating that a man has been faithful to his duty."

"Is that all? I thought it was a sort of medal, like what you get at school to signify your superiority."

"By no means. It merely shows that you have done nothing worthy of censure. Why, Helen, the stupidest soldier, who contrives to leave the army for some flimsy excuse, is sure to get his paper," said Mr. Lynde, gesticulating with warmth.

"And you didn't get any?"

"No."

"What was your rank?"

"Adjutant."

"Adjutants do the writing for the generals — don't they?"

"Yes."

"But, Morris, I can't imagine why you didn't have a paper; you couldn't have done anything wrong; I know you couldn't."

"It was considered, Helen, that I committed a very grave offence I will try to explain it. You are aware that I am not as cool as some men. I could not always keep my pen still when I was in the army. Public opinion was often absurdly wrong in regard to some of our movements, and I tried to explain, now and then, through the newspapers."

"Why, was that a crime?"

"No; it was well enough till I was so imprudent as to express my opinion of the high powers at Washing-

ton. Once I thought they made a mistake, and I said so. I loved my general, and when blame fell on him for a thing he could not help, I wrote a letter justifying him, and attributing the cause of his failure to the War Department."

"O, I understand. But are they like the Pope of Rome there at Washington? It is a pity if one can't speak one's mind."

"That was just what I thought, Helen, and it was where I erred. It is against military etiquette for an inferior officer to criticise a superior; indeed, it may be called a crime. When the origin of the letters was known, I was deprived of my position, suspended, and ordered home."

"Why, what an outrage! And all the while you still thought you had told the truth, and the War Department had done wrong?"

"Yes, and the whole world knows it now," said Mr. Lynde, giving Helen particulars of a certain ill-fated battle, which was one of our mistakes during the late war.

"Why, Morris, they ought to forgive you. I say it isn't fair. But any way, I wouldn't mind, for nobody will ever think worse of you."

"Wouldn't mind? Ah, Helen, if a man fails of getting an honorable discharge, it brands him among strangers; it is a stain upon his name which goes down with him to the latest day of his life."

"Is it so dreadful as that? I am very, very sorry. You are too good to be treated so. Have you asked to have it set right?"

"Certainly; I sent in a request at once."

"O, well, you will get it by and by; I just know you will. 'All things come round to him who only waits.'"

"Yes, Helen, but I have already waited seven years."

"Jacob waited twice seven," said Helen, soothingly. "It will come yet; but any way, your friends will only cling all the closer while you are in trouble. I am sure I never liked you so well in my life as I do this minute."

"My blessed Helen!"

"It is the solemn truth, Morris. But now tell me; was this what mamma meant before you came to Quinnebasset, when she said there was something weighing on your mind?"

"Perhaps so. Yes. I dare say."

"Because I supposed then it was an affair so very different. Indeed, it seems to me now mamma must have told me how you — that it referred to a young lady in the south. I should hardly have fancied such a thing without any reason at all — should I, do you think?"

Mr. Lynde must have heard what she said, for he recalled it a few moments later; but just now he was hardly aware of her meaning.

"Helen, you have not answered my question. Has a man in my position any right to tell a woman he loves her? Remember, it is you who must decide," added he, gently taking her hand.

Helen had never felt less sure of anything in her life than she felt just then of Mr. Lynde's love for Sharly.

"It is I he means," thought she, and impulsively placed the other hand in his.

But in another moment the delusion had passed.

Clear and terrible, as a leaf from the Book of Fate, she saw the sentence in Sharly's last letter, which had already burnt itself into her memory. "Sister, I am so happy! and when you come you shall know all about it."

"Ah, my dear, good Helen," said Mr. Lynde, in a tone "sweeter than a heart can bear."

It recalled her wandering senses. She drew herself upright, and responded calmly and deliberately, though without taking either of her hands from his.

"Why do you call me good? Anybody would answer your question just as I do."

"Anybody? But you haven't answered it yet. It's hard talking with you, Helen, when I can't see your eyes."

"Never mind my eyes. You know I am trying to drive them out of my head — metaphorically speaking," said Helen, lightly, though thinking how glad she was of her veil, whose thick folds gave her in some sort a feeling of invisibility. "I told you I thought the disgrace not worth minding. Government ought to be ashamed of itself; that's all. But she — this person — you ought to tell her: she has a right to expect it."

"She? Who?"

"Why, the — the one you care for," said Helen, not liking to be the first to speak Sharly's name. "The truth is, cousin Morris, I thought it was all settled; I supposed you were engaged long ago."

The words had no sooner passed her lips than she was shocked at her own presumption. Mr. Lynde gazed at her without speaking, as if what she had said was not to be apprehended in a moment. Then, rec-

ollecting that she had just alluded to a mythical southern lady, —

"Why, Helen, you don't mean, you can't mean — "

"O, no," cried she, snatching at his words as usual, before they were half uttered, and thus hopelessly clouding the matter, "I don't know how to forgive myself for being so forward. What are your affairs to me, cousin Morris, any more than the war in China? And to think I should have spoken so! Just as if I were reproaching you! I did not mean that at all. Why, you see," went on the poor girl, volubly, while the tricksy sprite who sat on the quivering mouth, making it say just the wrong things, laughed in his sleeve, you may be sure, "why, the truth is, I have understood all this for quite a long time, and have always looked upon you as a brother — not always, perhaps: but don't you remember how you said to me years and years ago, cousin Morris, that you wished I was your sister? I wished so too at that time, and lately it has been growing upon me more and more, and that is why I ventured to speak as I did; too freely, far too freely; will you forgive me?"

When Mr. Lynde replied, it was in a constrained voice.

"And so you accepted the relationship I proposed in those days, and have held to it ever since? You still look upon me in the light of a brother — do you, Helen?"

There was a subdued eagerness in his voice which told her he would be troubled if she said "Yes," though she knew next moment that this must be a mistake, for had she not every reason to believe it was just what

he expected and desired? Why did he not come out with the whole truth at once, and spare her the exquisite torture of all these questions?

"Cousin Morris, can you doubt it?" said she, again thankful for her veil. "I am glad, and proud and happy; and now you may go on and tell me all about it, please."

"Thank you; there is nothing more to be told."

What could he mean? And after sitting in silence for some moments, he said in a sort of monologue, as if he had been revolving the subject all that time in his mind, "I suppose it is as if an elder brother had gone away while his sister was a little girl, and had come back after she was grown up. I did not suppose you thought of me like that, Helen; but I am glad you have told me."

Was this the way Sharly's lover would be likely to speak? Ah, the whole thing was the very refinement of cruelty — "a baptism of fire," she said to herself. And presently Mr. Lynde arose, without having once spoken Sharly's name, and said he would go forward into the smoking-car to see if any one was there whom he knew.

"Charlotte Asbury," murmured Helen, behind her veil. "Is it you that are dreaming, or is it I? If it were not for that letter of yours — if it were not for that scrap of paper! Never fear, Sharly, I will give him up to you; he is yours. But such a glimpse as I have had of Paradise! Why, it seemed to me just now that I was going in; only — O Sharly dear — only I entered by the wrong door!"

The rest of the journey was commonplace enough.

A change had come over Mr. Lynde; and though he attended Helen as carefully as ever, there was yet something gone from his manner which had always marked it before. She missed the hearty undertone of enjoyment, the musical laugh; and it seemed to her that if she could look at him she should see his eyes roving absently, and his brows knitted in thought.

She was right. In the midst of his gayest sallies he was pursuing his study of the bell-rope, or gazing at Helen with an intentness which threatened to pierce four thicknesses of brown silk tissue. His demeanor was much more befitting Sharly's lover than it had been at first; indeed, it was more than brotherly; it was paternal. He talked only on general subjects, and Helen saw that whatever might be the state of affairs between him and Sharly, she should be none the wiser till she reached home.

He insisted upon taking her to an oculist in New York, but the verdict was rather disheartening. The optic nerve had been injured — so said the doctor — and the chances were, that it might never heal. She would grow no worse; he gave her as much comfort as that; and there was a faint possibility of a cure many years hence.

"That is, if I should live to the age of Sir Thomas Parr," sighed poor Helen, crowding back the tears which seemed to burn her tired eyes, and entering the cars again with a heavy heart.

Morris devoted himself at once to the task of keeping up her courage. He declared that doctors could not look into the future, and had no right to frighten patients; that he himself had had a friend in a similar

condition to Helen's, who was now perfectly restored after two years' patient waiting.

"Bnt were his eyes just like mine?"

"Precisely. At any rate, the same oculist said so; and now that I am satisfied yours is only a sprain, I have every hope of you, my dear child."

"Do you really? But you wouldn't deceive me."

Helen brightened after this, and was ready to talk of other things.

"You have been such a comfort to me!" said she, as they drew near their journey's end; "and I shall cling to what you told me of that friend of yours. You know how to say the right thing to me always, Morris."

"Thank you, Helen," said Mr. Lynde, his paternal demeanor suddenly deserting him; but added next moment, "Brothers like to have their opinions regarded, you know. They are an arrogant set!"

"O, very. And now where are we?"

"At Portsmouth. Courage, my dear, we are almost home."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BUSY BEE.

"All things come round to him who will but wait."

YET Delia Liscom had waited in vain, for more than two years, to discover what was "on Mr. Lynde's mind," and why his "heart's desire was not granted." She had asked roundabout questions of Sharly; she had catechized the twins; she had peeped into his portfolio and his letter-case; she had done all an honorable woman can do; still she had not unravelled the mystery.

At last, on the very day that Helen and Mr. Lynde started for home, she was suddenly rewarded for her long and harrowing suspense. A very dashing gentleman called and spent the night at Mr. Liscom's, on his way to Mount Katahdin; and Delia, naturally inspecting the day-book to find out his name, saw the words "Major Browning, New York." Of course the next thing she naturally did was to ask if he had ever seen or heard of Morris Lynde, for it was rarely, indeed, that any one from the great metropolis was ever seen at Quinnebasset.

Major Browning was a reckless fellow; I believe it turned out afterwards that he was only captain; but he really did know something of Adjutant Lynde's

army life and disgrace; or had known once, though he had now forgotten the very gist of the whole affair. However, what he didn't remember he could invent; so he very glibly made up a story to suit himself; and it suited Delia also, for it was scandalous, and would create a great sensation when repeated.

With remarkable self-control, she kept the secret two whole days, in order to spring it upon the sewing-circle that was to meet at her house on Wednesday afternoon. [This sewing-circle was called the Busy Bee, because it went about doing good — not because it carried a sting!]

Village society is made up of concentric rings, and the best part of Quinnebasset was securely fixed in the middle, while Delia and her coterie floated on the outside, feeling aggrieved, as if it were an arbitrary shutting out; for they never reflected that in this world, as well as the other, we must each go to our own place, which is sure to be the place exactly fitted for us.

The people in the middle rings aforesaid — such as the Asburys, Willards, Lorings, Joneses, Seldens, &c. — were so slow to believe evil, that Delia rejoiced to think she could a tale unfold which would startle them for once, and make them turn pale. Not that she had any ill will against Mr. Lynde, beyond a petty spite; there was not a living human being, outside her own family, that she would not have slandered for the pure love of gossip.

Fortunately the Asburys did not come to-day, and the Queen Bee, Mrs. Hinsdale, was called away at the outset; but everybody else was present, and the meet-

ing was a very busy one, full of the phthisicky sound of needles catching their breath in cotton cloth, for a certain poor family, near Old Bluff, was in pressing need of clothes.

"Miss Bumpus," said Mrs. Dr. Willard, "when do you expect Helen?"

"To-morrow, maybe, but day after, sure."

"And what about her eyes? We all feel so anxious to know."

"Well, I ain't any better informed than you be," said Theresa, rolling her right sleeve back, and plying her needle with almost as much force as a teamster would use in driving a plough. "All we know is, we had a telegram Monday: 'Helen well, but eyes weak; start for home to-day.' You may make what you can out of that."

"Poor child," said Judith Willard. "She has made such an effort to support the family, that it does seem hard she should be so afflicted."

"They can't be any worse than my eyes were that time I fell up hill and stuck a knot-hole into 'em," said Miss O'Neil, reflectively. "Tell her to wash 'em in a preparation of sulphur and ink" (sulphate of zinc); "that's what I used."

"Morris Lynde is coming with her, it seems. How convenient it is to have a cousin in the family!" remarked Delia, artlessly.

"He travels with Helen a great deal, Delia; didn't you ever notice it?" said Miss O'Neil, surprised at her stupidity. "Why, I rode up in the stage with them just before Squire Asbury died, the time he was in that catamouse state. When I lived at Machias, such things were not looked upon as proper."

"He has always been considered a very fine man," returned Delia, with a doubtful inflection on "considered."

"That's nothing," said Miss O'Neil, tartly. "I was always brought up to think everything of *family*, and he didn't come from one of the first families by a great deal."

"Why, Miss O'Neil, what can you mean?" said Mrs. Selden. "His father and mother were as fine people as ever lived in this town."

"I beg leave to correct you, Mrs. Selden. Mr. Lyman came here from the British Providences when I was a young lady, and used to go round splitting cucumber seeds, and selling 'em for muskmelon seeds. I remember it just as plain! I was visiting at your house, Mrs. Selden, making my velvet cloak, when he called with the seeds."

"Who called, did you say?"

"Moses Lyman."

A smile went round the room; but Miss O'Neil sat stern and grim. In her haste she had made a mistake, and called up a dead grandfather of quite another name and lineage from the Lyndes; but though she saw her error, it was against her principles to correct it.

"There is a great deal of wickedness in the world; we never know what people will do," said Delia, in great haste to get at her story. "For instance, don't you suppose there were a great many hypocrites and traitors in our last war, that we little dream of?"

"O, yes, indeed, lor yes," said Mrs. Porter Smythe, the divorced widow, who thought she understood mankind, if anybody did.

"Now look here," said Theresa Bumpus; "we are all poor sinners, but I guess them soldiers were better than the average, anyhow. You haven't got any special case in your mind — have you, Delia?" added she, sharply.

"Well, yes, I did hear something, but it comes pretty near home; something about Morris Lynde."

"Well, then, 'taint true, and you'd better not tell it."

"When I lived at Machias, that would have been called impudent, Theresa Bumpus. What makes you think Mr. Lyman can't do wrong?" said Miss O'Neil, still retaining the feeling that in some vague way he was responsible for the cucumber seeds.

"Perhaps Theresa wouldn't call it wrong to desert the old flag!" said Delia, looking around to note the effect of her words.

"You don't say!"

"Yes, I do! I'm sorry to be the first to tell of it, but it will have to be known."

Needles stopped, hands were raised, a murmur of surprise and incredulity ran round the room. Delia had made a sensation this time; and O, triumphant glory of littleness, how her eyes did sparkle, and the umbrella-charm on her watch-chain dance with delight!

"I have always known something was troubling the man's conscience, by his actions, and by little things that have been dropped now and then; but I got the whole story when I saw Major Browning. Wasn't he a splendid looking man, mother? — of the same regiment and company with Mr. Lynde; and he says he deserted fair and square, and they would certainly have shot him if he hadn't belonged to a secret society

that contrived somehow to clear him. Now, I do wish there was some chance for a mistake, ladies, but there isn't; Morris Lynde is a deserter and a hypocrite!"

"May I be allowed to speak?" said Mrs. Dr. Willard; but nobody seemed to hear her.

"I never liked his eye," said Mrs. Porter Smythe.

"Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion," mumbled Miss O'Neil, looking about to see which way the current was setting, so she could be ready to head up stream at a moment's notice. She seemed to behold Morris Lynde striding away with a great load of silver sewed up in a bedtick, like a man she had heard of once who deserted. Stealing runs in families; still, if the ladies were going against Mr. Lynde, she should stand up for him of course.

"I don't believe one word of that story, now come!" said Theresa Bumpus.

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" "Why haven't we heard it before, if it's true?" said several voices.

"Because we live so far back in the country," said Delia.

"Ladies," began Mrs. Willard again; but Delia continued: —

"He thinks he can come here and impose upon us simple-minded folks. It always did seem queer to me that he should spend so much time in this little village; but now I understand it."

"Why shouldn't he come to his native place, where he's appreciated and beloved?" said Mrs. Selden, echoed by Mrs. Loring, Mrs. Willard, Miss Willard, and Miss Jones.

Delia was out of all patience.

"You talk as if you didn't believe my word. For my part I never was so very much taken up with Morris Lynde; and I think I have as good a right to judge of him as any of you, living in the same house with him so long as I have. He is no favorite of mine, and I always knew there was something behind the curtain that would come to light some day."

Here there certainly was a motion of Liddy Ann Crane's foot towards the foot of Mrs. Porter Smythe, under the table; accidental, perhaps, for these ladies were Delia's friends, — if, alas, she had any friends!

"Ladies," began Mrs. Willard again; and this time she was allowed to speak.

"My father and my husband have known this all along, but have not thought best to mention it, for fear it would be misconstrued. Mr. Lynde did not desert; he was merely imprudent; and my father says there is not a more honorable man living." Then she told the story in few words, and so clearly that everybody understood it but Miss O'Neil, who could never be expected to understand anything.

"I'm so glad!" "So thankful!" "I knew it must be right somehow;" "I couldn't have believed it of him any more than my own son;" "I was always proud of Morris Lynde," said one after another, and all together; while Delia Liscom would gladly have shrunk up to the size of a dried pea, and disappeared from notice, if it had been possible.

"You'd better send word to that Major What's-his-name, that he didn't make out much, trying to put Morris Lynde down in the town of Quinnebasset," said Theresa, rather cruelly; for her old liking for

Delia had died out long ago. "Strange how some folks will lie, and stranger still how some other folks are always ready to believe 'em." And she began to roll up her work, for it was nearly time to go home.

"Felicia Bumpus," said Miss O'Neil, severely, "I haven't found a chance yet to speak. I was going to say, What right had Morris Lynde to stop fighting, and go to writing for the newspapers? It comes as near deserting as it can, I'm sure. All you could expect of a Blue Nose though," pursued she, digging up the cucumber seeds again. — "Delia, won't you be so good as just to step down cellar and get me a junk of pork? I'm very lame, and going to bake beans to-morrow."

Delia obeyed; and as she was returning through the kitchen with the desired article wrapped in a newspaper, she overheard this cutting remark from Liddy Ann Crane to Mrs. Porter Smythe in the front entry: —

"Well, if I was in love with a man, and he wasn't with me, I don't know as I should be so fierce to see him hung for it; should you? Delia has shown herself out this afternoon."

Poor Delia! And she had expected such a triumph! Now she had gained the contempt of her neighbors; and through her means Morris Lynde would only rise higher than ever.

Indeed she had not the slightest idea how strongly the sympathies of the Quinnebasset people would be enlisted for the unfortunate man as soon as his story was fairly known.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

"Then, darling, wait;
Nothing is late
In the light that shines forever."

WHEN the travellers reached Quinnebasset, it was pouring with rain, and so nearly dark that Helen supposed they would pass almost unnoticed; but as the stage drove up to the post-office, half the men in the village, and all the boys, seemed to be waiting on the steps to welcome them home. The first hand thrust through the stage window was Dr. Prescott's.

"How do you do, child? Bless your heart, how do you do?"

Next came Silas Hackett's hand, with a grasp that was almost painful; then Dr. Willard's; Pitkin Jones's; Mr. Selden's; followed by various boyish palms of all sorts and sizes. Everybody said, "Aren't you a little better, Helen?" or "I hope you'll soon be well;" but she observed that they did not once venture upon the plain, broad question, "What is the matter with your eyes?" It might be positive blindness for aught they knew, and with true delicacy they shrank from any direct allusion to the subject.

Helen observed another thing, as she sat in darkness, listening to the familiar voices; she observed that Mr. Lynde, as well as herself, was greeted with unusual warmth. Every one who came to her window went round, directly after, to his, not satisfied with tossing him a careless "Glad to see you back again, sir," but bent upon an honest hand-shake, as if he had been gone months, instead of only a few days.

There was an unusual tenderness in this, as if he, too, were in affliction, and needed sympathy. Helen thought it merely the brimming-over of full hearts, for she did not learn till afterwards that Morris's army affair had just become known throughout the village, and everybody liked him the better for it, and longed to show him hearty good-will.

It seemed very odd, even now, not to drive up to Jubilee Hill, but to keep on in an opposite direction to Intervale Cottage.

"Tell us you are not blind, Helen, and no matter what else it is, we will try to bear it," cried the twins, as heroically as if the worst were their own; and drew Helen into the house between them. The laugh which followed their brave little speech prevented the meeting from being too tearful.

"O, it does seem so warm and good to get home, mother, Sharly, everybody!" said Helen, going from one pair of arms to another, and just escaping a smothering from the baby and sister Bumpus.

"Dreffful news," said Bel, plucking Helen's dress the moment her cloak was off. — "Now you just hush," whispered Vic. "But mamma said I might if I'd wait a minute; and I did," remonstrated the little one.

"Tell it; so you shall, dear. I love the sound of your sweet little voice, let you say what you will."

"Well, she's crazy; yes, she is; she's crazy."

"Who's crazy?"

"Mrs. Page is in a rather peculiar state," replied Mrs. Asbury, guardedly. "Gloomy, and has strange impressions."

"O, that's nothing new," said Helen, with a queer smile. "I can tell you of one strange impression she has had, which you never dreamed of, I know."

"O, but she's dreffful worse."

"Yes," said Mrs. Asbury, "the clouds have shut down more darkly than ever upon her mind, and within a week or two she has been saying wild things about her husband."

"Thinks he is cutting her with knives," broke in the twins.

"The knives are his own thoughts," said Sharly. "She calls them spiritual knives."

"I don't know what you mean," cried Helen. "Is she really crazy?"

"Yes: didn't I tell you so?" said Bel. "Tooked her to the 'Sylum."

"To the Insane Hospital," explained Vic. It was all out now.

Mr. Lynde had refrained from telling Helen the story himself, and it had come so suddenly that she sank back upon the sofa half stunned. It is true the Asbury family and everybody else in town had repeatedly declared Mrs. Page would be insane some day, but nobody had ever really believed it.

"Tell me all about it, every single particular," said

Helen, in a trembling voice, for in spite of Mrs. Page's whimseys she was really attached to the woman.

They all answered together that it had seemed at last to come on rather suddenly; and when Ozem really comprehended the state of the case, he went round with his mouth half open, exclaiming, —

"Who'd 'a thought this of Dorkis, a woman with her head-piece! It's more'n I can bear, seems if!"

"It is too hard, too hard," said Helen. "It is his foolishness that has caused it all; but he will never know it."

"It was a shame to tell you before supper," said Vic, as they went to the table. "We made the waffles and sugared them on purpose, but now you can't eat."

"I shall eat famously, darling, if I once stop talking," returned Helen, briskly.

There was much to depress her besides her grief for Mrs. Page; she felt more sadness in coming home than any one supposed, for she mourned her father afresh to-night, and longed, too, for the old house which the rest had forgotten to miss.

Not a word was said about the dreadful subject of eyes till after supper, and then Morris had slipped away, much to Helen's disappointment, for she had intended to watch him and Sharly closely that evening. Sharly's welcome had been unusually warm, but she talked little; and wise as Helen was becoming in voices, she missed the key-note to this one, and could not tell whether the music was happy or sad.

"Yes, sit down here in a group now, round the Veiled Lady," said Helen, "and hear all about the bewitchment that came over her eyes."

But all the while she talked, the undercurrent of her thoughts was about Sharly.

"Do I hope she is happy? Let me put self one side, as if I were dead, and then see. Yes, I do hope it, I certainly do."

"Well, there, Helen, I'm glad you've come home in such good spirits after all," said Sharly. "It's awful to have anybody round that's low-spirited, and I almost dreaded to see you, I declare!"

They were on their way to bed as she spoke, and Helen groped along by the baluster, feeling as if she were struggling up the hill of life, and it was steeper than any one knew.

"No; I have so much trouble that I can't afford to be low-spirited," said Helen, though she was pretty sure Sharly would not understand her, and Sharly did not; she had never had the least experience in fighting against Giant Despair.

"How queer you are, Helen! If my eyes were like yours, I should just die of horror; I couldn't laugh as you've laughed to-night; dear me, no! There's such a difference in people about taking things to heart: don't you think so?"

"I don't know — There now, you precious child, tell me all you promised to tell in your last letter," said Helen, shutting the door of her chamber, and holding Sharly as if she had wings, though Sharly was quite willing to be held, and had no thought of flying away.

"All about what, Helen? You have such a funny way of beginning right in the middle! How do you like this new style of hair?" with a peep into the glass. "O, I forget you can't see."

"Well, Sharly?"

"Well, Helen? Why, there's a white hair in your curls."

"That's nothing new; I've already found two or three."

"Why, what a pity! Gray hairs, Helen Asbury?"

"Yes, a June frost, I suppose. People do get nipped a little at twenty-one, sometimes. But why don't you begin, darling, and tell me all about yourself?"

"Well, I will; ask me something, Helen."

"How long has it been going on?"

"*It?* People don't talk English where you have been — do they?"

"Your love affair, Sharly! There, is that plain enough, or shall I speak it in French?"

"O, *that* has been going on ever since — well, ever since you went away."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and before, too, only I didn't really know it."

"Ah?"

"I didn't think there was enough of me. If it had only been you, now, Helen!"

"I? What an idea! Go on, Sharly." For she had made another pause, and was twirling a pearl and emerald ring round her pretty forefinger. "Has he ever talked to you about this?"

"Talked to me?" Sharly's gay little laugh rang out at the question. "Perhaps you think I made the proposal myself. O, what a Helen!"

"Sharly," said the elder sister with tender anxiety, though it pained her to utter the words, "are you sure you understand him perfectly? Men are very

strange sometimes, and appear to mean one thing when they really mean another, or don't mean anything at all."

"Now, you dear old goosie," said the little coquette, with a pout and a smile. "I'm the sort of girl to fall in love before any one asks me — am I? Thanks for your lecture! But it may relieve you to know he had to go down on his knees, almost, before I would pay the least attention. Why, I kept pretending it was a great joke; and when he said, 'Sharly, do listen to me,' and — and — well, you know what they say — I told him he was making believe, and his heart was somewhere else. I did really think so, Helen."

"Ah?" Helen stood holding her hands towards the fire. She had not turned her head or moved a muscle while Sharly was speaking.

"Why should you have fancied he cared for some one else? That could not have been true, Sharly. You don't think so now?"

"Why, yes, Helen, you forget he did once; but that is all over now, and I don't mind it a bit. Should you mind it, do you think?"

"I don't quite know — what you mean."

"Well, it isn't likely he ever truly cared for her, not as he does for me," said the little beauty, confidently. "I don't believe Judith was ever so very pretty — do you?"

"*Judith?*"

"Why, yes; she was the one Silas was engaged to, you know."

Silas Hackett!

The truth came to Helen with such a shock that her heart stood still.

"Why, Helen, what are you doing? Don't open that window; it will make the room as cold as Greenland."

"O, I was only getting a breath of air. What a beautiful night it is, and the sky so full of stars!" said Helen, who had slipped off her green shade, and was folding her hands softly together.

"Tell me the rest, Sharly. It seems very odd — so odd I want to laugh; but I believe I never was so glad in my life."

And down went the window and the green shade at the same instant, while Helen began to pace the floor rapidly, pausing every now and then to warm herself before the stove.

"Are you really so glad?" said Sharly, much gratified. "I was afraid, in the first place, you weren't, for you seemed so stiff. I declare I never did have such hard work telling anything. — Why, what does ail you, Helen? Are you crying or laughing?"

"Laughing, I believe," said Helen, wiping her eyes, and pausing suddenly as Delia Liscom's story rushed into her mind. "Was this what troubled you last summer? Was this what made you unhappy?"

"Me? No? As if I would fret over a lover!"

"Then it was nothing of the sort, Sharly?"

"Of the love sort? Why, no, indeed," was the curt reply.

"Really and truly?"

"Really and truly, Helen. I was bothered about something; but you needn't ask what it was, for I shan't tell. O, how I do hate last summer!" said Sharly, stamping her foot pettishly.

"Then we won't talk about it," said Helen, so happy that she was fain to open the window again for another peep at the stars.

"Helen, it's rather queer for you to laugh in this way," said Sharly, drawing back half offended. "Are you making sport of me, I'd like to know?"

"O, no, no. Only you've acted so oddly all the way along, never telling me any names, and leaving me to puzzle my head till it almost went distracted. You're a harum-scarum old Sharly, and I don't more than half believe it's Mr. Hackett this minute. Are you sure it isn't Arthur Selden, or that Fred Mellen from Boston?"

"O, is that what you're laughing at?" said Sharly, greatly relieved. "Why, it was easy enough to guess! Who could it be *but* Mr. Hackett? And wasn't he very attentive last summer? As if I would *look* at Fred Mellen, or Arthur Selden, or any of those!"

"You did look at them a great deal," laughed Helen. "And next time you write letters to me, I want you to put things down in black and white, if you want me to know what you mean."

"The fact is, I didn't want you to know," said Sharly, with charming frankness. "I thought likely 'twould blow over."

"O, yes, I remember you always despised 'worthy young men.'"

"Well, Silas isn't so *worthy* as I supposed he was — not half. He's ever so nice and jolly when you are fairly acquainted with him, Helen. I know just what you think — that he's slow and poky; but it's the greatest mistake. O, I do want you to know him, he's such a darling!"

"I must know him, Sharly. I'd like to kiss him this minute!"

Such an outburst delighted Sharly immensely, and she threw her arms round Helen's neck, exclaiming, —

"O, I shall love him dearly if you say that. He thinks you are perfectly splendid, and I'm going to tell him what you say. He thought you didn't like him because you wouldn't go to ride with him once. Don't you remember you said, 'No, thank you; but I'm sure Sharly would be glad of the chance'?"

Helen laughed immoderately at the recollection. Surely her spirits were remarkable, considering the state of her eyes. "But tell me, you little irresponsible butterfly — are you sure of your own mind, — no, your heart, — as sure as sure can be? You know it would be dreadful for Silas to be deceived again."

Sharly looked the picture of injured innocence.

"You didn't think I'd engaged myself to him? No, indeed; O, no. I've only tied a sort of beau-knot, and I can slip it out any time within six months, — we call it an understanding, you know, — and nobody has been told but mother and you."

"That is cautious enough, I declare, Sharly; but it looks as if you have a little doubt of yourself."

"Why do you keep saying that, Helen? Who is there any better than Silas? Why, Dr. Prescott says he is an honor to this town, and if he had turned his attention to politics, he might have gone to Congress."

"Yes, I've always heard he had a good deal of ability," said Helen, thinking of his awkwardness and of Keller Prescott's comment which had been handed down for years: —

"'When Si Hackett speechifies, he makes gestures like a galvanized frog.'

"He has a good mind and good principles, and *if* you only love him, it's all right."

"There it is again! I know what you mean. You think he is too awkward for anything; but I've changed my mind on that subject. It does seem to me awkwardness is rather nice in a man!"

"O, it is — is it?"

"Yes; and some men are too polished and graceful: now there's cousin Morris, for instance."

"You little simpleton!" said Helen; but she said it to herself.

"And I'm so glad you appreciate and approve, for I know I never could love any one else; there's nobody like him in the world."

And Sharly, having once begun, prattled on in her pretty way all the while they were unpacking Helen's trunk; and Helen, with her grand self-forgetfulness, listened and sympathized, hardly pausing to think why it was that her heart rejoiced.

The last night she had spent in this room, three months ago, she had hardly closed her eyes for wretchedness; to-night she lay awake for very joy.

"It was I he meant, it was I he meant! I have a right to be happy, and it won't defraud Sharly. Life is so beautiful and symmetrical when you only get hold of the right clew!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MISUNDERSTANDING.

"Alas! how love can trifle with itself!"

"GOOD morning, Princess Helen. I see you are still playing the Veiled Lady."

"Good morning, Queen Mother. Yes, I can't exhibit my 'tristful eyes' yet a while. But do tell me how it has fared with you all this long, long time?"

"O, I've got on bravely, better than I expected."

Mrs. Asbury had gone half way up stairs to meet Helen, and they were now pacing the hall with their arms about each other's waists.

"But I've missed you so, my daughter! I drift into dark places sometimes, and it brightens me to have a little talk with you."

"Ah, mother dear, you can't have needed me as I've needed you. I shan't live long enough to forget how I've pined for the sound of your voice! I want to hear you talk a week without stopping. Firstly, are you pleased with Sharly's engagement."

"Entirely; her understanding, you mean."

"Yes, I know; isn't she a cautious child? I believe I'd like it better to see her a little reckless — wouldn't you? As it Silas were the whole world, and she didn't care for the rest of it! That's the way I shall feel, if I'm ever engaged."

"You and Sharly are two people."

"Very true, mother; but does she care for Mr. Hackett with her whole heart and soul? For that is the only love that is safe and sure. It ought to strike clear down to the very roots of her life, or she will act Judith Willard right over again."

Helen spoke so fervently that Mrs. Asbury stole a glance at her earnest face, wondering where she had learned so much of the power of love.

"You know Sharly better than I do, Helen, and I want you to study her. She has a profound respect for Mr. Hackett, so far as that goes."

"Respect!" cried Helen, contemptuously.

Mrs. Asbury smiled.

"Would you have her marry without it? It is the very corner-stone of wedded happiness."

"O, I suppose so; but a stone is cold and hard; you want something more than that."

"Well, dear, I think it's all coming right. You are inclined to be too anxious about Sharly. You know you always take her affairs to heart more than she does herself."

Yes, so she did; Helen began to see that this was true. Even if Sharly had really cared for Morris, as it once appeared, the feeling would not have been so deep that anybody need run away for her sake!

"You alwaye judge Sharly by yourself, Helen, and there is where you make a mistake. She isn't in the least romantic, and you mustn't expect it."

"No, mother, and I hope Mr. Hackett doesn't expect it, either."

"O, no; I fancy he is easily satisfied, as people usually

are who have all their lives given more than they have received. And this is a new thing, as yet. Why, I did not even know it was in progress till about a month ago."

"How could that be, mother? He came here, of course."

"Yes, he has been coming all the fall, and so have all the other young men in town. Sharly has boated with one, and croqueted with another; and really, though I had my suspicions, I was sure of nothing till she told me herself a fortnight ago."

"So that is the reason you didn't write me about it, mother. If I had known —" Helen checked herself. "It is almost strange Morris shouldn't have given me a hint of this."

"I dare say he knows nothing about it. He and Sharly are the best of friends, but there was never the least intimacy between them."

"No, not the least, mother, and couldn't be."

Helen had always seen this clearly enough, till Delia Liscom threw dust in her eyes.

"They admire each other," went on Mrs. Asbury, "but their only meeting-point is music. They are very dull without you."

"Ah?"

"Don't stumble against the hat tree, little blind girl."

"Not blind; mother, I've only had a glimpse into the darkness," said Helen, gayly.

It was pleasant to think she had come into the light again in spite of Delia Liscom. But what could that letter have meant? After all, it still remained a mystery.

Morris was not in the dining-room when they entered. It had been quite the usual thing for him to drop in just as they were sitting down at table, and the girls had placed an extra plate beside the Veiled Lady's place this morning.

"He will be here soon," thought Helen, "to ask how I bore the journey."

But breakfast passed without him, and it was three in the afternoon before he came.

"He had been sketching; had heard, through Mrs. Hinsdale, that Helen's eyes had received no injury, or he should have run in at once to inquire."

Helen was sitting before the cheerful wood-fire in the sitting-room, holding Bel in her arms, and there were only those three in the room.

"Helen, you are looking pale. I'm afraid the journey *was* rather hard for you."

"O, no."

She knew that she was pale, and that she trembled. It vexed her too. Morris was calm enough, and especially paternal. No sudden enlightenment had come to him. He did not know yet of Sharly's "understanding"; but if he had known, what then? How could Sharly's affairs affect his relations with Helen?

"Well, little Harebell, are you glad to have big sister at home?" said he, drawing his chair towards them, and stroking the child's curls.

"Yes, gladder 'n I'd be to have a great pile o' gold, high as this house!"

"Flattering! And how are you going to make big sister happy?"

"O, I shall sit in her lap and tell her stories, and

Baby Boy'll 'muse her, he's so cunning. And mamma'll make her nice things to eat, — and O, some candy!"

"That's right, Harebell. Only make the candy sweet enough, and she'll be happy. — Didn't you and I have a grand reception last night, Helen?"

"At the post-office, you mean? O, Morris, wasn't it enough to warm one's heart through and through?"

"Yes, I thought so. Did you understand my part of the ovation?"

"Not then, but I do now; and I love Quinnebasset for showing such sympathy."

"So do I. Blessings on the dear little village. Blessings on every soul in the whole length and breadth of it."

"On Delia Liscom, too?"

"Yes, on Delia Liscom, too," laughed Morris. "Very likely she'd be glad to see me hung in '*jeopardy*,' as Miss O'Neil informed me just now; but as it's a downright impossibility for such a thorough gossip as Delia to be a real friend to anybody, I overlook her peccadilloes. — Did your picture come safely?"

"Yes, thanks to your packing. But you've forgotten to tell me what you've been doing this fall. What is your last work?"

"A study of Old Bluff, wrapped in autumn haze."

"O, I want to see it. What does it mean? You say a picture must always have a meaning."

"The name of this is Retrospect. It conveys a dreamy sense of half-clouded distance, like that which always envelops the past. By the way, Helen, I think the past is one great cheat."

"Why so?"

"Because when it comes back to us, we don't see it as it was; we see it as we used to think it was."

"Can't understand."

"Why, we get deceived sometimes; imagine things that are not true — don't we?"

"O, yes."

"And even after we are undeceived, the delusion still clings to us; the past is steeped in a haze of our own fancies, like Old Bluff in a mist."

"Yes, I understand now. And that is why you paint Retrospect in a softened light."

"Precisely."

"Cousin Morris, what makes you look so sober?" said Bel, when half a minute had passed without any one's speaking.

"I was thinking, Miss Moppet, of the time when I believed there was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, and I wish I believed it now."

"O, I always knew better 'n that! What a funny boy! How old were you?"

"As old as I am now; that is, I have imagined things quite as absurd as that rainbow story within a very short time."

"Did you? What was it?"

"Bel, dear, I wouldn't ask so many questions," said Helen, in a low whisper, under cover of a kiss.

"Well, Miss Muffet, once I had a friend, and I thought she cared for me as much as I cared for her; but she didn't, not half, or quarter, or a sixteenth part as much; wasn't it a pity?"

"Yes; I should have thought she would; but — but — I spected you was goin' to tell a story."

"Naughty little tease," said Helen, pinching Bel's ear, and looking into the fire. Playful little flames leaped up and caressed the wood softly; she watched them with a little flutter of the heart, wondering what Morris would say next.

"Well, it isn't much of a story, Bel. I built a castle in Spain — that's all. I thought they had rocks in that country to set a house on, but they hadn't, and I found my castle was built on the sand. I didn't know it, though, till there came a great rain and washed it away."

He spoke lightly, and evidently supposed neither of his listeners had the least idea of his meaning; but there was a quiet sadness in his tone, which Helen thought she understood, and she longed to tell him he had builded better than he knew; but how was it possible for her to say it? Ah, but she had deceived him the other day in the cars, with that wicked story of sisterly attachment; wrung out of her by the emergency of the case, to be sure, yet all the same a downright lie!

"So you haven't any castle now?" said Bel.

"No, dear, nor so much as a cobweb left to make one of. But I must finish my story — and the last part of it isn't a fairy-story at all; it's the up-and-down truth. I'm going off to leave you, and I've come to say good by."

Helen pressed her cheek close to Bel's, not venturing to look up.

"Going in the morning," added Morris.

"O, no, no, no, don't go, *don't* go!"

Of course it was the little one who spoke, springing

out of her sister's arms into his. Helen, suddenly cold and dizzy, took up the tongs and arranged the fire; but the glare and flicker of the coals hurt her now, and she closed her eyes in pain.

"Not going, Morris? What makes you? Where do you go?"

Her voice was constrained; cold, he thought.

"To New York, Helen, to work."

"But you were taking autumn sketches here."

"Autumn is over now."

"But you'll come back for winter sketches?"

"Why should I?"

"Because it's just pearls and diamonds here in the winter."

"No doubt; but I've already planned more work than I can do in two years."

"O, wait now, and hear *me*," pleaded Bel, with a grieved lip. "You must come back, cousin Morris; you must, for we shall all cry so if you don't!"

"Do you really want me, little one? That does me good! I'll come back some time, Bel, if I have good news to bring. You'd wait till you had good news, if you were in my place — now wouldn't you?"

"You don't mean those stupid papers from Washington," exclaimed Helen; "you wouldn't wait for those." She spoke like herself now, all the restraint gone.

"I don't know; perhaps I can wait if I try."

"Why, Morris, it's nothing in the world but foolscap and trumpery!"

"Peter Schemil's shadow might be called trumpery by the world in general, Helen, but he couldn't live without it."

"O, fie! Peter was morbid."

"Cousin Morris," said Sharly, coming in with her worsted-work, and leaning over the back of his chair, "mamma says, Be sure to go into the library before you leave; she has something particular to say."

What a pretty, caressing manner Sharly had! Helen liked it especially well just now, for she thought it must be soothing to Morris; but she could never have leaned over his shoulder in that way, much less have stroked the hair on his forehead.

She knew Sharly must be expecting a visitor; for she could see her exquisite little slippers peeping out from the folds of a flowing brown poplin, and observed that in walking about the room, she managed to set things to rights, here and there, with a touch. Presently Mr. Hackett entered; and after Mr. Lynde went away, he came up to claim the sisterly kiss from Helen, which she had promised through Sharly.

It was very pleasant, and an entirely new sensation, this of having a grown-up brother; and Helen declared to herself, over and over, that she was very happy.

As for Morris, what a strange interview she had had with him! It had begun and ended in a misunderstanding a thousand times foggier than his picture of Old Bluff. However, he would come again in the evening; and then somehow the fog would blow away.

But he did not come, and she saw no more of him till next morning, when he ran in hurriedly to bid the family good by. As usual, everybody was sorry enough to lose him, while he pretended to take their lamentations all in sport, and to be going away in high spirits.

It was all over, and the door had closed upon him, before the truth fairly came home to Helen that he was gone, and their broken conversation of yesterday would not be finished.

She stood like one dazed, still feeling the warm clasp of his hand, and hearing the words, "Good by, Helen; God bless you." He had come to her last, though she was in the very middle of the group.

"I don't believe you care one bit about cousin Morris," said Vic, reproachfully; "you haven't once said you were sorry to have him go."

"What chance has Helen had to speak?" asked Mrs. Asbury, smiling, but glancing a little curiously at the silent girl. "You children talk so fast that we older ones are obliged to keep still."

"But are you sorry, sister? Just say so, and I'll believe it."

"Yes, very, very sorry; but you mustn't expect me to cry, Vic, for it hurts my eyes."

Thereupon Vic was satisfied; but Mrs. Asbury still pondered.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SHARLY'S CONFESSION.

"What's writ is writ; would it were worthier."

THE days seemed much alike after this. Winter set in early, with a white glare, and Helen dared not look at the snow, even from the windows. Her chief exercise consisted in brisk walks across the front entry and through the cold chambers, for Intervale Cottage did not boast of a furnace. When the twins met her in her promenades, muffled to the chin, they called out, —

"Well, my lady, how is the travelling to-day?" and Helen threw back some playful answer, though it must be confessed that she found it hard work sometimes to be cheerful. As she wrote Di, she felt "like 'still cider' nowadays; the sparkle was all gone."

"Shall I ever look back to this winter and say, 'When I had that trouble with my eyes'? I tell you, Di, it's very easy to have faith when you know exactly how things are going to turn out! But with this great thick curtain of uncertainty right before you, faith does come hard! 'Howsomdever,' as Mrs. Nason says, I may never have another opportunity just like this to learn patience, and I'd better be about it."

A few times in dull days she ventured to take short runs in the front yard with an umbrella over her head, and her eyes protected by a lovely pair of smoke-colored goggles. But one day a traveller, passing the house, and seeing her going at such flying speed, stopped at the Liscoms to inquire what crazy woman they had in the village, and why she wasn't taken to the Hospital? After this, Helen felt obliged to walk very circumspectly whenever she went out with goggles and umbrella.

Mrs. Asbury read aloud when she could spare the time, the twins when they could think of it; and Sharly's intentions were good, but she never got beyond the first page of Froude's History of England, owing to the daily letters to Mr. Hackett. "It was surprising how anxious the man was about Helen's eyes!" said little Sharly, laughing.

The great event was Theresa's departure for Aroostook. She called herself a "weak sister," and wished her heart was "as hard as linkumvity," so she wouldn't mind leaving her old friends. She wrote after her arrival that she was "all scrimped up with the cold," and it was "kind o' lonesome off there, nobody to neighbor with, you know;" but ended by declaring she was "the happiest woman in these United States, and was proper glad she had come. Hoped the Asbury children would all experience pure and undefiled religion, that fadeth not away. Yours truly, THERESA BUMPUS B."

They all missed Theresa at first, but soon got on very comfortably without her. The evenings especially were always pleasant, for Helen had plenty of young friends, who vied with one another in trying to make her imprisonment as cheerful as possible.

On the whole, considering the extra amount of taffy, butter-scotch, and oilnut candy consumed in the family, the twins pronounced it the jolliest winter they had ever spent. It was so nice to have Helen in the house, with nothing to do but knit baby's stockings and talk. They supposed she did suffer; but then the goggles made her look like a frog; it was really too funny! "Glad you bear it so well," said Helen, demurely. "You show a great deal of fortitude."

Sharly's "understanding" had become a full-grown engagement, and she was quite open about it now, especially since she had heard it hinted that Eleonora Jones was "the least bit in the world envious." Not that Sharly had a desire to triumph over Eleonora or anybody else; only it was rather gratifying to know that Silas was appreciated in the very highest quarters. There was one thing certain; Judith Willard was not at all disturbed by Mr. Hackett's engagement; on the contrary, she rejoiced in it.

Helen watched Sharly tripping about the house, with little snatches of song on her lips, and had not the least excuse for "worrying" as to the state of her affections. "Your voice is as sweet as a robin's, Sharly."

"Is it? — There, I meant to read to you this afternoon, but I suppose I ought to finish this splasher. Silas's birthday is coming next week."

"O, yes, never mind the reading. I do very well."

"I know it, Helen; you look as contented as a kitten, sitting there in that dark corner. I suppose you can bear it better because everybody pities you so. — Now don't shake your head. You are very much admired, too. Judith Willard says you are a heroine, and

Dr. Prescott calls you a philosopher. How *do* you keep up your spirits?"

"Do I keep them up, though? Well, there's a little refrain, that's always running through my mind, to the tune of 'Bunker Hill.' 'Remember *Mrs.* Page.' — I keep humming that over to myself whenever I begin to dwell upon my own troubles, 'Remember *Mrs.* Page,' and I won't let the dark waters go over me; I won't, I won't, I *won't!*"

"O, Helen, you're strong-minded. I don't think strong-minded people deserve the least credit, for my part. If you were like me, now, so sensitive, so alive to every feeling, you couldn't bear this as you do; I'm sure you couldn't."

"'Don't talk about suffering here below,'" cried Helen, shivering at the bare thought of her beloved Sharly's having anything to endure.

"And to think of your taste for painting," went on Sharly, heedless that she was giving pain. "Cousin Morris says it's in you to make a first-class artist; and here you are moped up in the house, and can't look at a brush."

"Well, I ought to be thankful it is in me, even if it has to stay there," said Helen, shutting her teeth together hard.

"Do you know what Morris calls you?"

"No."

"He told mother you were a skylark with your wings clipped."

"Did he? He'd call me a chimney-swallow now, if he could see me hovering over the pots and kettles. Isn't it nice that I am so much better as to wash dishes?"

"Ah — um Just as a body thinks. But, Helen, I never did understand about Morris's popping off so suddenly last fall — did you?"

"He said he had ever so much painting to do, I believe."

"Yes; but it was rather odd; you know we all thought so, for he did seem to care so much for you; and as true as you live, Helen, I believed there really was — "

"Fie! you foolish Sharly — "

"Some sort of understanding between you; so there!"

"Charlotte D. Asbury, you're just like all engaged girls. You look upon life as a kind of checker-board, and when you are married you'll get into the king-row and be crowned, and that's the end of it. Now I want to talk to you about something else besides matrimony, if I can make you feel interested. I want to talk about what I shall do to earn money. I've an idea of learning the piano: what say?"

"Why, you can't look at the keys."

"Not yet, though perhaps I can by and by. And I can play with my eyes shut, for there are blind pianists, you know. I wish you were competent to instruct me, Sharly, and I'd begin this very day. Don't you think by a few months' study I should be able to teach little girls?"

"Why, Helen, you could do it now."

"Yes; but I wouldn't. It would be like Naomi Giddings' taking that class in Virgil, when she hadn't been through the Latin Reader."

"Now, Helen, you know as much as half the teachers: you understand music twice as well as I."

"She could never have leaned over his shoulder in that way." — Page 340.

"O, well, you're a prodigy; you don't need to know anything; it's all intuitive. Now I've been thinking, if Mrs. Loring would only come here and give me lessons, it would be just the thing, for she is so accomplished in music. And who knows but she might, for she is very lonely this winter, with her husband in the legislature, and no children in the house. Think 'twould do any harm to ask her?"

"Perhaps not," replied Sharly, waiting till she had counted a few stitches. "Splashers" were more important to her than business affairs.

"I'm so glad you don't object, Sharly, for I should be sorry to mortify your pride. Let's see; what music have you here? It won't hurt me just to look at the titles — Chopin; Beethoven's Sonatas."

As she turned over the sheets, something dropped to the floor. She stooped and picked it up. "A letter to me. How very strange! And the seal has been broken!"

"That — why, that — I thought I put it away," stammered Sharly, reaching out her hand for the letter.

"You mustn't read it: think of your eyes, Helen!"

"Mustn't open my own letter, indeed!"

"O, no, no; please don't; do give it to me. I'll explain it all by and by," cried Sharly, seizing the letter in a sort of frenzy, and wrenching it from her sister's grasp. This was too much.

"I am in no mood for child's play," exclaimed Helen, authoritatively. "That is my letter, and I must have it."

"Why, Helen, you really show temper," said Sharly, looking shocked. "Didn't I tell you I'd explain if you'd wait? Hark, there's the door-bell; Mr. Jones, I'll warrant."

And off ran quick-witted Sharly, with the contested letter safe in her bosom, leaving Helen to pick up the wandering worsteds she had left, and face the guest with a smile, if she could.

Mr. Jones came often, and usually brought some little offering in his hand; sometimes a well-selected bouquet from his own green-house for Mrs. Asbury; sometimes the last new book or magazine to discuss with the family; now and then some dainty dish for Helen, with his mother's compliments. As he was a perfect gentleman, a good small-talker, and never wearisome, both the girls found his visits very agreeable. "And he is so safe!" said the experienced Sharly: "no matter how often he comes; Silas would never think of being jealous."

But Sharly and everybody else had made a slight mistake in regard to Mr. Jones: his delicate attentions were not so aimless as it might appear.

"Why, what a short call!" said Sharly, rushing back for her splasher the moment she heard the front door close. "I don't believe you talked to him much. Didn't he inquire for me? There, Helen, you're looking so handsome, and you may thank me, for it's all owing to your getting so excited over that letter."

Until this moment Helen had entirely forgotten the letter.

"Now you'll be ashamed of your temper, for I've come, like a good little girl, on purpose to 'fess," said Sharly, dropping on her knees.

"Here it is; hold it while I read; but if you ever tell anybody, I'll never, no, never forgive you."

The letter bore date of the last October, and read after this wise: —

"Dear Madam: Your MS., entitled 'The Stormy Bridal, or The Wife-Hater,' has been duly read, and we regret to say will not serve our purpose. Thanking you, &c., &c."

The signature was that of one of the leading publishing-houses in Boston.

"Never sent a line to a publisher in my life. 'The Wife-Hater'? That must be Bluebeard. What in the world — Aren't you going to speak, Sharly?"

The child was in a paroxysm of laughter. "Wait till my heart stops going pitty-pat," said she, with a pretty make-believe of shame. "It was I, Helen. I wrote the story; and now put an end to me, for I don't feel fit to live."

"You, Charlotte Asbury — you wrote a story?" cried Helen, clasping her hands and laughing for very amazement.

Sharly looked aggrieved now. "There, I knew you'd make fun of me, and think I was too ambitious. You never did have any opinion of my abilities, and I didn't mean you should know it. But after you once saw the letter you wouldn't be satisfied, and I had to tell you. Yes, Helen, it was a novel, that was; and I wrote it to help support the family. — Why, Helen Asbury, you're shaking this minute!"

"Go on, Sharly; it's enough to make a pyramid shake!"

"Yes, laugh at me, do! You don't appreciate me, Helen, and never did. O, I've borne a great deal of looking down upon, but mamma has been the worst. She thought I didn't care about our being poor; she thought you were the only one that cared and wanted

to work; but all the time I was working, — O, how hard I worked!"

"You darling child! And this — this novel — you sent it in my name, did you?"

"Well, yes. I was afraid it would be rejected, and I didn't want it coming back to my address, for Mr. Willard would mistrust what it was."

"But you were willing he should think it was your sister Helen's. Thank you, dear!"

"Well, you weren't at home, and any way I didn't think you'd care; you don't, do you, Helen?"

"Not one fig. But what was the story about?"

"O, there was a man that was married in a dark night, in a thunder-storm, to the wrong woman. He thought it was Leonora, but it was her wicked foster-sister, Madeline. And then — Do you want to hear the rest?"

"Yes, some time, when my nerves are stronger."

"Why, Helen, how strangely you look! You don't care?"

"No; O, no. But tell me, did you make your heroine say, —

"'Ah, my sister, my sister! Eyes have you, but they see not, ears have you, but they hear not. If you were not here Mr. —— would love me. You are standing between me and the sun. If you don't step out of the way, you cruel girl, I shall freeze to death!'"

Helen repeated the words without pause or mistake.

"Why, yes; Madeline said that, as she stood over Leonora in the night with a bottle of prussic acid in her hand; but how did you know?"

"One of your slips of paper was found on the floor, and I saw it," replied Helen, quietly.

"O, well, I don't care now; but you mustn't tell."

"No, I shan't; but what did you mean by Mr. ——?"

"Why, that was the hero, Algernon Fitzwilliam. You see I didn't decide on the Fitzwilliam till I began to copy it off. You don't know what a bother that last name was to me."

It had been a far greater bother to Helen; that name, or rather the lack of a name! Had it not been the means of exiling her to St. Louis, and bringing all sorts of calamities upon her devoted head? But this Sharly should never know, the dear unconscious child; though it *would* have been a satisfaction to tell Delia Liscom! Mr. Fitzwilliam indeed! It was impossible to help laughing.

"You wouldn't think it was so funny if you'd seen how I worked. And then to have it come back! I tell you this writing is nothing but luck. If Judith Willard had written 'The Wife-Hater' now!"

"But, Sharly," said Helen, as seriously as she could, "what made you think of undertaking a novel, when you have never had any practice in writing?"

"O, I got Vic to weave the plot. She hadn't any idea how I was going to use it, though."

"Vic? It must have been a wild one!"

"Yes, and there was the trouble, I suppose; for I'm sure the language was good It was a little too absurd having Algernon meet Leonora and her father on the ship — and the storm and the pick-up by boats —"

"Did you send the story anywhere else?"

"No; I was disgusted when it came back, and burnt it up. I don't care for fame now," said Sharly, blushing, and looking into the fire; "but I ask you, haven't I done what I could for the family?"

Helen wanted to say "No, you have done what you couldn't;" but she prudently held her peace. Sharly had made a great effort; and, considering her natural instability, it really was extraordinary; but she would never try to do anything more; she was going to be married next summer; and "O dear, of all the piles of sewing!"

"Dear little thing," thought Helen, with a sudden pang of envy, as she looked at the bright young face; "she is in a beautiful dream-land. Ah, well, let her stay there; but I, for my part, must be wide awake. I'll go this minute, and ask mother if she won't call and talk with Mrs. Loring about the music-lessons."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"EXTRACTS."

"Cheerfully, like a child of God."

QUINNEBASSET, April 3.

DEAR DIDO: Aunt Marian interviewed me last week on the Pitkin Jones affair. She had just returned from a long stay in Boston with aunt Pauline Raymond, who is sick; and I supposed she had given up the care of our family during her absence; but no, indeed.

"Why, auntie, how in the world did you ever hear of that?" said I, "I've been so private about it."

"Pitkin told me himself last winter, Helen. He thought he was doing you a high honor, and I thought so too."

"Told her!" She got it out of him by questions, of course.

"And Helen, you may imagine my surprise, when I learned the sequel yesterday! I never could have dreamed of your refusing a fine young man like that, and a church member — too. What have you against him?" said she.

We were sitting together in our little sitting-room, and she had brought her work, which was a thibet dress to mend.

"Nothing at all against him, aunt Marian."

"Now that's absurd. It is *something*, of course," said she, looking up in her "eminently practical" manner, as if she were going to sift the whole thing through the sieve of common sense.

"Isn't he intelligent enough?"

"Yes'm."

"You don't like his manners?"

"They are perfect."

"Well, he's wealthy, and a general favorite. So what *can* it be? O, too old, perhaps?"

"I never thought of his age. I simply don't love him, aunt Marian."

"Is that all?"

"All, and quite enough, I think. I wouldn't marry a man I didn't love, if he were 'brother to the sun, and king of the four and twenty umbrellas,'" said I, as bold as a lion.

"What do you know about love, child?" said she, cutting me through and through with those steel-blue eyes of hers.

"I have an idea what it is, ma'am; every girl has."

"Ah, you've dreamed a dream — have you? And how does the *right one* look?"

"He doesn't look like Pitkin Jones."

"Indeed! And so you throw away an excellent offer, because you fancy it doesn't come from the right source?"

"Yes'm."

"I've no patience with you! Do you know you may never have another opportunity so good as this, as long as you live?"

"Yes'm, I don't expect I shall," said I, shocked to the ends of my fingers to hear such very practical remarks!

"Well, what then? Suppose nobody should ever arrive who quite suits your fastidious fancy."

"Then I shall never marry; that's all."

"Yes, that will be the amount of it, though you don't think so now, and don't mean a word you say. You will settle down into an old maid, Helen Asbury, as sure as you live."

"You can't frighten me that way, auntie. I'd rather be an old maid than marry Mr. Jones."

"Nonsense! If he was distasteful to you, or you could bring up any reasonable objection, it would be all very well; but you ought to have a little forethought and common sense, Helen, and consider how you are situated. Here you are, with no prospect of ever being able to paint again, and nothing to fall back upon, refusing the good fortune which Providence kindly holds out to you. It seems to me absolutely wicked. What do you expect to do for your own support?" said she, with that chilly look, that makes me want to get nearer the fire.

"I begin to-day to teach a music-class," said I, and it was the first she had heard about it.

"A music-class! You're not competent."

Then I told her of my three months' course under Mrs. Loring's instruction. We've all felt a wicked delight in keeping this from the Inspector General. (Beg mamma's pardon, I promised not to use that pet name again!)

She was amazed — I declare I did feel a little triumphant.

"But you'll find it very hard to get scholars."

"Not at all so, auntie. I have fifteen already." More amazement. Then I named them over: Katie Hackett, Maggie Selden, &c., &c. She dropped her work, and was too excited to be able to thread her needle; for of course she was mending the dress with ravellings of the same, in the very best manner.

But I needn't expect to triumph a great while where aunt Marian is. I happened to mention that Mrs. Loring and Mr. Jones had both been interested in getting up the class; and she rated me soundly for "letting Mr. Jones do anything for me, after I had treated him so unhandsomely."

In vain I assured her we were the best of friends, and he thought I had done exactly right; she would listen to nothing but her own voice. O, how hard it is to appreciate that woman!

N. B. She said afterwards to mother, "I approve of this music-class. There is a great deal more *of* Helen than I ever used to think. I shall begin to own her as a Dillingham!"

Needn't trouble yourself, auntie; I'm satisfied to be an Asbury.

Well, and how do I like teaching?

O, it is glorious to be alive once more! Three months of making believe dead has quite cured me of idleness, and I'd enjoy any work, even shingling a barn.

It takes patience — some of the girls haven't any "ears," and can't "carry a tune;" and of all the discords! Sharly runs out of the house during lesson hours, for her ear is too exquisitely fine to endure it.

These are the very girls she might have had last spring, or two years ago; but I'm glad she didn't undertake it, for she is too sensitive to teach music. Mother wishes she was too sensitive to work worsteds. I find this eternal "filling-in" is positively wearing to mother's nerves; so it seems she does possess nerves, though she has a wonderful gift of concealing them.

You ask about cousin Morris. We have weekly letters from him (not weakly). He is as bright and busy as ever, but I don't know whether he will visit us this summer or not.

Theresa writes occasionally; confesses that "*his* little girl is a *case*," but is in the highest spirits; feels that she is in the right place, and signs herself "yours truly, Theresa Bumpus B."

April 5. — O, Di, we have news to-day, that Mrs. Page is dead, and her husband is coming with her remains this afternoon by a special train. We were not prepared for this, as the superintendent had pronounced her fully restored to reason, and she was about to return home, well and in tolerable spirits.

——Evening. — It is all a mistake. She merely had a dying attack, caused very likely by Ozem's guileless behavior (he is visiting at the hospital), and with her usual forethought she instructed him just what to do with her remains. O, those poor remains of hers, how many times they have been buried — in imagination! He did as directed; went to the conductor and chartered a special train — the only trouble was, he was ahead of the times, as usual — "Dorkis" failed to perform her part of the agreement, and Ozem could not fulfil his contract with the railroad.

Vic says, "Somehow it doesn't seem as if 'Dorkis' ever will die, because she never has died, you know."

Sharly won't be married till fall, and we're all so glad! Ever yours, HELEN.

QUINNEBASSET, June 12.

YOU DEAR LITTLE DIAMOND: You say "Let us bury Mr. Salloway in the Dead Sea;" and I hasten to the funeral. It is a capital grave for him, dear, and may he sink quite, quite to the bottom!

You ask if I'm happy? Yes, very — or I suppose so, for I never think anything about it. Of course life isn't what we expected it would be, when we were young, say fourteen and sixteen; but it's sublime, and what's the use wasting a minute of it in vain regrets for what might have been, when there is Some One taking care of all our affairs, and doing better for us than we can ask or think?

You say, "In childhood you fancy there's such a good time for you in the world."

I know it. The trees and flowers promise it, and the blue sky, and the stars. But after long years of disappointment (we are twenty-two now!), when you are perhaps giving up and thinking it is all a cheat, and there is no happiness, you turn and find it in your own heart! Right there, Di, shut in like honey in a cell. I suppose the "peace that passeth understanding" is the name for it, and when it comes to you so softly, then the old glamour is over everything again, just as it was in the far-away days of your childhood.

I like my music class more and more, and my eyes grow better and better. I do hope I shall paint again

some time; I certainly do; as soon as next fall perhaps. This long waiting has only made me all the more eager for work.

> "Still our place is kept, and it will wait,
> Ready for us to fill it soon or late;
> No star is lost we once have seen;
> We always may be what we might have been."

P. S. I'm glad you continue to like Mr. Sanborne so well. How did he happen to change his mind and go with you to Rome? Did he have anything to do with casting Mr. S. into the Dead Sea aforesaid? These are rather saucy questions, but you must remember I am

NIECE TO THE INSPECTOR GENERAL.

QUINNEBASSET, Sept. 12.

DEAREST DI: Such an excitement! The bells are ringing all over town, and you can't guess what has happened. Morris Lynde has received an honorable discharge from the army! Yes, at last! He telegraphed the news to mother, and somehow Delia Liscom heard of it before we did, and spread it all over town. Then the church bell, the court-house bell, and the bell in Memorial Hall, began to peal at the same instant, as if they were rung by electricity — or a corps of boys.

Morris is coming to-morrow night, and —

Sept. 13. — You never saw any one more overwhelmed with astonishment than Morris was when he arrived last evening. You see, the first thing he heard was a cannon. The men and boys had dragged it all the way from Poonoosac, and tugged it up to the very

tip-top of Jubilee Hill, back of our old house; and the moment the stage came in sight, they fired it off. Morris asked very innocently, "Who's elected?" supposing they were celebrating a political victory. "We are only congratulating a man whom Quinnebasset delights to honor," said Dr. Prescott. "Do you know of a native of this town who has been abused by the government, and has just got his rights at last?"

Then all the men and boys at the post-office — and I suppose it was half the village — took off their hats and cheered with a three times three.

But that isn't all of it. They have let him run into our house long enough to get a few breaths, and at eight o'clock they are coming *en masse* to march him off to Memorial Hall. I've come up to my room to calm myself a bit, for we are all going to the hall to a grand banquet. The twins are perfectly hilarious, and I tell mother she must take them in hand, for it will be as much as I can do to dress Sharly's hair in the new style, and help Mrs. Dr. Willard make the coffee.

Yours, in a high state of flutter,

HELEN.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONGRATULATIONS.

"'Joy never feasts so high
As when the first course is misery,'"

SAID Mrs. Asbury, thinking of her nephew's long years of waiting.

It was a great jollification, and everybody came to it, from the remotest corner of the Wix neighborhood to the very borders of Poonoosac; from the head of Medumscott Pond to the foot of Old Bluff; the top, centre, and sides of Quinnebassett, with bits of several other towns thrown in.

The tables in Memorial Hall were loaded down with "all sorts of genteelnesses done in sugar," not to mention fish, flesh, and fowl, or the enormous oyster-stew over which Miss Delia Liscom presided with as high an air of importance as her stature of four feet six inches would allow.

Mr. Lynde received all his felicitations with an air of gratitude which gained universal approval. He also did his best at trying to talk with everybody at once, and appearing to eat a little of every viand offered him; for he would not be such an ingrate as to confess, even to himself, that a quiet evening with his aunts and cousins would have been preferable to all this hilarity.

"Mr. Lynde, allow me to congratulate you," said Mrs. Hinsdale, rustling towards him in her stately black silk, and smiling graciously, though there was an undercurrent of disapproval in her manner even now, for aunt Marian was an eminently investigating person, and it had never been quite clear to her logical mind why Mr. Lynde should spend so much time in Quinnebasset, if he did not intend to marry either of her grown-up nieces.

"We have not seen you here for a very long time, Mr. Lynde."

"No, madam; my engagements have been quite pressing during the past year."

"I know your aunt and the girls have missed you exceedingly. Isn't it fortunate that Helen's eyes are better?"

"Very."

"You have heard of her teaching music. I believe you correspond with Helen?"

"Occasionally; yes."

"It seems so sensible and practical of her to turn to the very thing she *could* do, when painting failed. She has shown an eminently Christian spirit too. I take pains to say this to you, Mr. Lynde, because I wish you to understand and appreciate my favorite niece."

"Thank you, madam."

Mr. Lynde had never smiled so warmly upon Mrs. Hinsdale before, and the good woman felt attracted in spite of her judgment, but said to herself immediately, —

"I really believe it is this man, with his fascinating manners, who has bewitched Helen, and cast poor Pit-

kin in the shade. I'm determined to find out, once for all, whether he has any serious intentions. Sister Katharine is so easy that I suppose she never gives it a thought." Helen was somewhere in sight, and nothing but his good manners prevented Mr. Lynde from leaving Mrs. Hinsdale and going over to her. "Have you observed how handsome Helen grows, Mr. Lynde?"

"Does she? She scarcely needed any improvement."

"Now, that is sheer gallantry, Mr. Lynde. Of course you know, as well as I do, that Helen was one of the large, quiet sort of girls that grow better-looking as they grow older. I tell her uncle Charles she will make a really beautiful old maid."

"Ah, is that to be her destiny? 'By the pricking of my thumbs, something *comic* this way comes,'" remarked Mr. Lynde, as Miss O'Neil approached, of course putting a sudden end to the conference, and leaving Mrs. Hinsdale as much in the dark as ever.

"I'm so glad the war has cleared you, Mr. Lyman," said Miss O'Neil, extending her mitted hand with her courtliest smile; for somehow the fancy had struggled through the cobwebs of her brain, that she herself had instigated and directed all the honors he was receiving to-night. "I never did believe you were guilty of stealing, and if you've got a friend in this town, it's Norah O'Neil."

"Thanks, my dear lady," said Mr. Lynde, bowing low over the still handsome hand.

"Ah, Mr. Lyman, your manners remind me of the young men I used to know at Machias, very much so," said the old lady, highly delighted.

"Indeed!" His eyes were roving towards a group

a few feet distant, of which Helen was the centre, and he was thinking how much her face had gained in meaning since he saw it last. "It grows fairer every year in the qualities of the soul. There has been a great change since I met her first in Boston; the stubborn look is all gone now, and she is as sweet as a 'saint's lily.'"

"Yes," continued Miss O'Neil, "there was one of them, by the name of Fontleroy, that my father and I met at Boston; and he went with us to the Athenæum. It was before I joined the church, and I think it was called 'The Taming of the Shoe;' at any rate, a man came out and began with one accord to scream as loud as he could scream: 'My kingdom for a — a —' I declare I forget what."

"Could it possibly have been a horse?" suggested Mr. Lynde, with infinite gravity, his eyes still wandering to that charmed group. Sharly had come up now and joined it.

"As hopelessly pretty as ever," thought the artist. "Sharly's beauty is too complete; it has a smoothness, like some of Pope's verses, which becomes a little fatiguing sometimes. Now Helen's face —"

"It doesn't seem to me it was a horse," said Miss O'Neil; "but it's no matter now. Mr. Fontleroy was a great admirer of mine, and that's why I always thought so much of you, Mr. Lyman.

Half a dozen people were standing near, listening to this highly edifying conversation.

"Did you really tell Delia Liscom you were going away in the morning?" asked some one.

"I told the stage-driver so; perhaps Miss Liscom heard me."

"Not to-morrow!" exclaimed two or three voices.

"Well, I'm sure I'm sorry; and it reminds me of the last evening I spent with Mr. Fontleroy," said the old lady, shrewdly following the direction Mr. Lynde's eyes were taking. "He tried his best to declare himself, but there was such a crowd coming and going that he couldn't find a chance. It was at Mrs. Gilman's party, and I always thought Mrs. Gilman was to blame. — Does Helen know you are going away in the morning?" added she, so abruptly that Mr. Lynde began to think she was losing the remnant of her mind.

"Helen? No: I have not mentioned it to any one. I have hardly seen my friends yet."

"Well, she ought to know it! — Helen Asbury!" exclaimed Miss O'Neil in a higher key, "come here a minute; I want to see you."

Helen came, just a little tardily, with a slight look of apprehension in her face; for what embarrassing position the bird-witted spinster might be about to place her in, it was impossible to foresee.

"Hush!" said she, in a loud whisper. "I called you because I knew Mr. Lynde wanted to see you!"

Purely unselfish for once in her life, and prompted by the vague wish, —

> "God send them together
> Who fain would be loved."

"He has been looking at you just as Mr. Fontleroy looked at me the night of Mrs. Gilman's party; and if Mrs. Gilman had *only* found a chance for him to speak!" said Miss O'Neil, with a sentimental sigh for the lost husband of her youth; *one* of the lost hus-

bands, for she had a score or two in her memory, and mourned them, one after another.

Helen dropped her eyes. "Miss O'Neil, if you have nothing particular to say, please excuse me, and I'll run back again. Mr. Jones, and Mate Willard, and I were discussing a plan for to-morrow."

"No, no," said Miss O'Neil, with playful good humor, "you shan't go back. I'll go back myself. I'll slip off without his noticing, for I've been young myself. O, yes!"

"You forget I'm not deaf," said Mr. Lynde, laughing most unexpectedly, to the infinite relief of Helen, whose cheeks were now 'rose sublime.'

"Well, I'm sure I haven't said anything improper," retorted Miss O'Neil, looking blighted, but immediately recovering; "and I couldn't help seeing how steadily you looked at Helen; but I shouldn't have taken any notice of it, though, if you hadn't said you were going off to-morrow."

"Going to-morrow!" exclaimed Helen, raising her flushed face in supreme amazement.

"Yes; I have engaged passage to Europe, and only came for a hail and farewell."

"To Europe, Morris! You can't mean it."

"Yes, it is as well to go while my laurels are fresh; is it not?"

"It was just so with Mr. Fontleroy," sighed Miss O'Neil. "I never had a supicion he was going away, but he went to the other end of Massachusetts, and a friend of mine sent me a paper last week with the obituary of his death; consumption and bled at the lungs; died rich, with a wife and family."

Mr. Lynde was looking at Helen again, and with preternatural acuteness the benevolent spinster continued, —

"Well there, I must go before I think of it, and thank Benjie Prescott for that handkerchief. Did I show it to you, Helen? It has 'N. O'N.' all spangled with rosebuds in the corner, and came in a letter; but Delia Liscom says it's the general opinion that it stands for Latin, and means *fool!* She needn't expect me to believe that, when Benny was an old scholar of mine, and I used to keep him under the table half the time for tickling the boys!"

With which lucid reasoning, the "neuralgic old nondescript" departed, to stir up another farrago at the farther end of the room. Helen turned then to the window, for she could not run away without rudeness. Mr. Lynde turned also.

"What moonlight! What shadows!" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

There was nothing left in the world but moonlight and deep shadows to Helen just then. So many years as she had known Morris, such pleasant talks as they had had together, how could she spare him again, when a few months without him had seemed so long, and nobody knew how tedious! But he was going without a regret — perhaps would never come back. She had been entirely deceived in thinking he ever cared for her. — Well, let him go. Hadn't she promised herself she wouldn't "eat her heart" for any man?

"Looking at the constellations, Morris?" said she in a tone as cold and clear as her name; he had always said "Helen" was "a cold word."

"I am not looking at any constellation in particular. I was merely thinking how the stars seem to be crowded together, having friendly times; whereas they are really as distant as the worst enemies."

"Appearances are deceitful," said Helen, flippantly.

"It is just so down here, Helen. People stand side by side, and seem to be on the most intimate terms, when in fact they are eternities apart."

"I know it; eternities apart," said she, bending her head a little to play with the tassel of the window-curtain. She did not mind his taking her hand, for they were out of the range of people's eyes; and even had it been otherwise, every one knew Morris was a family friend. What she did mind was the untimely down-plashing of a tear from her eyes upon his forefinger. "In wine is truth;" in tears, too, much oftener. "What have I done?" was her terrified thought.

"You were going without letting me know," said she, like an idiot, — not intending to say that at all, but something more about the stars.

"And you were letting me go without knowing you cared," said Morris, turning towards her with a half-enlightened look, adding very irrelevantly, "Open confession is good for the soul. Helen, it is a fearful wrench for me to tear myself away from you; but I can't stay where you are, and hear you call me brother."

"I'll make open confession too — that was a lie," said Helen, quickly, though she could have bitten her tongue out next moment for its foolishness.

That was all; but the remark seemed to give entire satisfaction. Morris looked as if his enlightenment was complete; and there came a "clear shining" in

his eyes, like the pleasantness of summer meadows. There was a gradual illumination of Helen's face also, and the slightest possible movement of it towards his inclining cheek, as he whispered, "Thank God for the happiest moment of my life."

There were no more "open confessions," and they had time for none, as a sudden thump upon his shoulder warned Mr. Lynde that Delia Liscom was present with fan and eye-glass; and next moment Miss O'Neil rushed up to prepare their minds for some "singing by the core."

It was an odd coincidence that Morris's face and Helen's should both be so radiant, and Miss O'Neil could not help exclaiming, "I knew he had something particular to say, Helen; but he wouldn't have found any chance to say it, if it hadn't been for me."

Delia saw at once that all her flirting and meddling had come to nought, and the little umbrella danced a quickstep, with envy, and what would have been disappointment, if hope had not died out long ago; but she rallied her feminine pride, and said archly, —

"Allow me to be the first to congratulate you, Mr. Lynde! O, you needn't think I haven't had eyes all this time!"

As if any one had ever accused Delia of not having eyes!

Morris and Helen stood together during the "singing by the core," silent, but with the silence the soul keeps when it confers for the first time consciously with another soul. And they did not need speech just yet, for there are no words worthy to stand in the place of that voiceless communion.

"Morris," whispered Helen, suddenly, "there comes aunt Marian. Can you hide me anywhere?"

"I'll take you over to that chair beside Mrs. Page, and then escort the enemy to the refreshment table and get her a cup of coffee," said Mr. Lynde; so the Inspector General was out-generalled for once, and did not come near Helen that night.

When the jubilee was over, and had been thoroughly discussed at the Asburys, and the children had gone up stairs, Mr. Lynde drew his aunt Katharine one side, with Helen, into the library.

"You can guess what I want to ask of you, dearest aunt," said he.

"Yes, Morris; you want an early breakfast," said she with tears in her eyes; for it was a fashion which ran through the whole family to veil their real feelings with a jest. It had always been her dearest wish to see Morris and Helen united, but she had long ceased to expect it, and the sudden revival of the old idea thrilled her now with pain.

"And what would you like for breakfast? One can afford to make quite a parade when a nephew is starting for Europe."

"Not a step do I start for Europe yet a while, and you can't bribe me with the best breakfast that was ever served, my dear, hospitable aunt!"

"Helen, is it really true? isn't he going?" said Mrs. Asbury, her voice trembling with emotion.

"He'll have to go; he has spoken to the stage-driver, and to Delia and Miss O'Neil," said Helen, hiding her face on her mother's shoulder, and clasping her arms round her neck.

"O my precious daughter, how can I give you up? How can I do without you?"

After this little outburst of selfishness, Mrs. Asbury wiped her eyes, and when she spoke again, it was with her usual loving kindness.

"Thank Heaven it has turned out so exactly as it should! God bless you both, my children!" The last words were spoken with her hands upon their heads. "Ah, Morris, I suppose you know, or, if you don't, you ought to know, that you are the only man in the world to whom I would be willing to give our Helen."

"My best aunt, my dear mother, there is no man alive worthy of her," said Mr. Lynde, fervently.

Then she turned away and left the lovers. For them life was a path of roses; but for her the roses had all shed their leaves, and an early winter was setting in. Mr. Lynde opened the door, and called after her softly.

"Auntie dear, wait till Sharly is married, and then we'll all go abroad together, and the twins shall finish their education in Paris."

It was a passing thought, and Mrs. Asbury only laughed as she walked away, little thinking that the plan would really be carried into effect within another year.

"You are *our* Helen to her and the rest," said Morris, as the door closed; but to me you are *my* Helen henceforth and forever."

Then he raised her sweet face to see what was written on it; for she did not show her heart like a wild rose; she was like a lily which reveals itself only to those who take the trouble to look.

"Ah, Helen —"

Then there was more said on both sides, but not for

your ears or mine, my dear girls; so pray let us have the delicacy to withdraw. I am sure your principles forbid you to listen at key-holes; moreover, we have lost our last claim upon this heroine, as she is no longer Our Helen.

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